

Ecosystems for traditional Craft-making in Mexico:

Towards stakeholder interactions that
support local knowledge and culture

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Abstract

Craft-making in Mexico is rooted in prehispanic traditions that have undergone continuous transformations throughout the country's history. It is practised today by a heterogeneous collection of groups that struggle to maintain customs, autonomy, and livelihood in an activity increasingly aimed for commercialisation. In parallel, designers in the country continue to be interested in collaborating with artisans. Projects are usually initiated with a focus on economic development.

This thesis takes a critical look at how designers and other stakeholders in local craft ecosystems interact with artisans in Mexico. Considering that traditional craft-making revolves around local knowledge and culture, the study explores the transformation of craft due to changes in rural contexts and increased focus on commercialisation. By exploring that, the aim is to identify alternative paths for collaboration that support local knowledge and culture. For this purpose, the study undertakes a qualitative inquiry on the perspectives of artisans, public institutions, and designers and other creatives engaged in the ecosystem. The research process includes immersing in the local context, collecting and discussing stakeholder perspectives, and drawing implications for practice based on relevant findings.

The study identifies that stakeholders in the craft ecosystem interact through three mechanisms: support, collaboration, and distribution and commercialisation. Based on the analysis of the data collected, the study determines five implications for interactions that support local knowledge and culture: (1) Engagement and participation from the grassroots level, (2) Collaborative identification of issues and definition of goals with the artisan or community, (3) Increased support to grassroots initiatives, (4) Interactions that address issues at the service and system levels, and (5) Continuous trust-building in the interactions.

Keywords collaboration, craft, design, Mexico

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I think there's a distance separating us, I think it's both geographical and a... sort of barrier. I don't know if that barrier is stronger from the side of academia or from the side of the artisans, who have not been able to fully open their doors, to a certain degree.

But it's also important to make new paths, and both things are perfectly valid[...] that is how the world finds new and different ways to connect. We are small circles that at the same time link to each other, and we have to consider that. Everything is linked, that's why we end up noticing that the ceramics of this place has a lot of similarities with the ceramics of that other place.

—Master pottery artisan

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1. Introduction and motivation

It is difficult to pinpoint the reason why designers in Mexico and similar economies are drawn to engage with local craft traditions and the artisans that practice them. Studies attribute the phenomenon to the absence of a robust local industry for the practice of *industrial design*, and to initiatives that find in semi-urban and rural communities the need for economic growth, rescue, and preservation of craft (see: Artesanías de Colombia et al.; 2005; Gomez Pozo, 2009; Rojo Cabrera, 2018 & Sosa Ruiz, 2014). Although both hypotheses seem reasonable, the possibility of cultural exchange and mutual understanding through making has been a more powerful driver in my personal encounters with artisans.

However, it seems essential to question the validity of *industrial design* interacting with—or in the worst case, imposing over—*traditional craft*. It is relevant to understand how practices informed by local culture and traditions are transformed, under which circumstances and for what purpose. These questions are at the centre of an ongoing discussion about the usefulness and orientation of engagements with artisans in societies classified as “*developing*” or “*underdeveloped*”. In Latin America, the technological and economic driven perspective of design has been questioned by researchers advocating for a re-focus of the discipline to support global justice (see: Garduño García, 2017). Furthermore, scholars such as anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018), call attention to the environmental impact of modernity and its possible continuation in design projects driven by a narrative of *development*. Arguing that under a different logic, approaches that foster local knowledge and culture can emerge.

Interestingly, my personal experience of collaboration with traditional craft-making started in 2015 thanks to a development initiative. Not one aimed at the craft sector, but rather at Mexican designers: JICA's program in *Modern Design and Traditional Culture & Craftsmanship*¹. The ongoing program focuses on encounters between Latin American designers and Japanese artisans, which ties it to international efforts linking development, design, and traditional practices. The program allowed to directly engage with “*ways of thinking rooted in craft practices that predate yet live alongside modern manufacturing techniques*” (Tunstall, 2013, p. 236). Although experiences are different for each participant, in my case, collaboration took the form of a craft apprenticeship. The making of Japanese lacquerware functioned as a hands-on exploration of the world of artisans. The apprenticeship allowed me to gain practical know-how, and informed a series of design exercises discussed, iterated, and executed with the help and supervision of a Master artisan and his apprentice. A process that required months of practice, interaction, and exchange in the workshop. The experience shaped my interest and informed my approach. To this day, I consider the time spent with the Master and his apprentice to be the most valuable aspect of the experience, sharing ideas, developing a friendship that

¹ This training program is offered by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and is backed by Mexico's National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT). It consists of a sponsored technical training in Mexico (2 months) and Japan (8 months) focusing on language, culture, and contemporary Japanese design and its links to traditional craft. The main component of the training is the collaboration with Japanese artisans guided by professors from Kyoto Institute of Technology.

transcended the project, and learning about them and their practice. This long-term exploration would not have been possible without the backing and funding of an institution like JICA, or outside the context of a development program. Upon returning to Mexico, I continued to work on small craft projects in parallel to my job as an in-house graphic designer. In Tonalá, Jalisco, collaborating in my free time with a Master artisan of *bruñido* pottery over a period of six months. In this case, social interaction and exchange of knowledge remained as the most valuable aspects of the interaction.

As design transforms into a more social, inclusive, participatory and democratic discipline, the likelihood of engaging with "*forms of making that are not merely technological, while embracing new creations, looking at the entire range of design traditions (within the West and beyond)*" (2018, p. 133) also increases. This thesis aims to contribute to the overall discussion on craft and design interaction, based on field observation and reflection on issues addressed by *postdevelopment* theory. This discussion concerns artisans and the designers, organizations, creatives, and institutions that engage with them. This project attempts to describe interactions in practice, in search of alternatives that consider issues that are relevant for craft-makers and their communities, while also functioning as a personal reflection of encounters with traditional artisans.

1.1 Research questions

The main goal of this study is to critically explore how designers and other stakeholders engage with traditional craft-makers, given the frequent occurrence of these partnerships in Mexico. The study seeks to analyse current practices and identify opportunities for interactions that are sensitive to the vital role that *traditional craft* plays in semi-urban and rural communities. For this purpose, the study revolves around the research question:

How can designers and other stakeholders in craft ecosystems of Mexico interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?

To answer this question, it was considered relevant to analyse current interactions between artisans and stakeholders. Since diverse institutions, associations, private initiatives, and other collaborators interact with artisans, the study attempted to understand the drivers, practices and mechanisms of the ecosystem. With this goal, the study sought to first answer the sub-question: (1) *How do artisans and other stakeholders currently interact in local craft ecosystems, what are the existing mechanisms, practices and challenges?*

Through the analysis of practices and mechanisms, issues at the local level and in the relationships between stakeholders were identified. The study then focused on answering a second sub-question: (2) *Considering existing mechanisms, practices and challenges, how could stakeholders interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?*

2. Methods and data

The results are based on desk research and qualitative data gathered between December 2018 and March 2019. To identify local issues, the project first aimed to understand the existing mechanisms, practices and challenges in the interaction between stakeholders in a craft ecosystem, by visiting a series of nearby communities and discussing issues directly with members of each group. According to Muratovski *multifaceted phenomena* can be examined in depth using qualitative research (2015, p.102) Since craft practice is embedded in cultural, political, and social processes, a qualitative inquiry was considered a fitting alternative. The study aimed to analyse interactions through the collection of individual experiences, the description of relationships between stakeholders, and finally, by discussing the challenges and implications in a participatory sensemaking workshop.

Qualitative methods make it possible to “capture people’s thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of various meanings and processes” (Muratovski, 2015, p. 37). Allowing to analyse participants perceptions of the interactions in the ecosystem. Additionally, qualitative research was used for the study instead of a practice-based approach—previously experienced when collaborating with artisans in Mexico and Japan—for two reasons:

1. Preliminary desk research indicated that short engagements rarely benefit craft communities (Rojo Cabrera, 2018, p.91; Sosa Ruiz, 2014, p.7). Considering that the study could not be a long term interaction, qualitative methods were considered a more reasonable approach.
2. To maintain an objective and critical perspective, assuming the role of an observer of current interactions instead of engaging directly in collaboration with artisans.

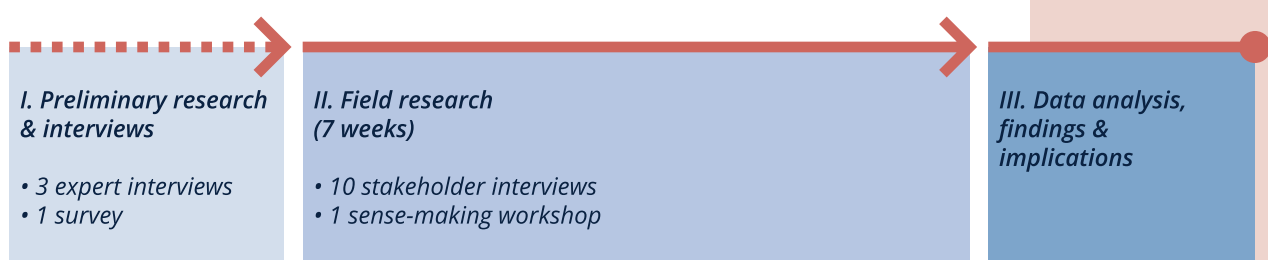


Figure 1 shows the different stages of the project. As a starting point, a review of relevant literature, three experts interviews and a small survey of ten designers and one NGO collaborator were conducted remotely. The second stage consisted of seven weeks of field research. Through observation and collection of testimonies, issues in craft production and distribution at the *Centre and Lacustre* regions of Michoacan were identified. The data gathered allowed to understand the role of each participant within the craft ecosystem, and to map the relationships between them.

Figure 1. Research stages

Field research started in the state's capital, through contact with staff at the *Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan* (IAM)—the main institution supporting artisans in the region. After a few initial interviews with staff and artisans in Morelia—the state's capital,—emerging research paths were explored based on insights from informants, spending most of the time in the nearby towns of Capula, Patzcuaro and Janitzio. Fieldwork consisted of non-participant observation, casual conversations, and semi-structured interviews to gather data on the challenges faced by the different stakeholders; as well as their attitudes and motivations (Muratovski, 2015, p. 145). In the last stage, a sensemaking workshop was conducted at the IAM offices, focusing on current practices and possible alternatives in the interaction with local artisans. In the workshop, specific challenges faced by the institution and general issues of the craft sector were also discussed.

2.1 Data collection

The project was divided into three stages. *Stage I* of the project and the first two weeks spent on the field, provided data to answer sub-question: (1) *How do artisans and other stakeholders currently interact in local craft ecosystems, what are the existing mechanisms, practices and challenges?* While most of *Stage II*—remaining 4 weeks of field research— focused on gathering information related to sub-question: (2) *Considering existing mechanisms, practices and challenges, how could stakeholders interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?* During *Stage III*, the collected data was analysed to determine implications. *Table 1* shows all the stages, questions, objectives and data sources of the entire project.

Semi-structured interviews and survey

Thirteen semi-structured interviews and one survey were conducted for the whole project. Interviews had an average duration of 40 minutes and the survey took roughly 15 minutes to complete. As shown on *Table 1*, members of each stakeholder group were considered: artisans, resellers, designers, public officials, and other professionals interacting with the craft sector.

In *Stage I*, three designers with over six years of experience interacting with artisans were interviewed. A script (see *Appendix 1*) was adapted from the topics discussed in *Section I* of the practical guide *Designers meet artisans* (Artesanías de Colombia, Craft Revival Trust, & United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, pp. 4-11). The material was used as a reference, given its comprehensive take on theoretical issues related to the interaction with artisans. The topics discussed included:

Research stage	Question / Sub-question	Data sources
- Stage I. Preliminary research and interviews & First 2 weeks of Stage II. Field visit	<p><i>(1) How do artisans and other stakeholders currently interact in local craft ecosystems, what are the existing mechanisms, practices and challenges?</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>Inquiry of the perception of designers with different levels of experience.</p> <p>- Survey of perceptions amongst a sample of designers interacting with artisans.</p>	<p>A) Interviews with 3 designers with 6+ years of experience in craft & design interaction.</p> <p>B) Survey of 10 additional professionals interacting with artisans.</p>
- Remaining 4 weeks of Stage II. Field visit	<p><i>(2) Considering existing mechanisms, practices and challenges, how could stakeholders interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>- Collection of perspectives on the interactions with artisans</p> <p>- Analysis of stakeholder relationships</p> <p>- Identification of possible challenges in the local craft ecosystem</p>	<p>A) Semi-structured interviews with 10 stakeholders on-site (Michoacán, México).</p> <p>- 3 Public officials</p> <p>- 6 Artisans and/or craft resellers</p> <p>- 1 artist closely collaborating with artisans</p> <p>B) 7 weeks of non-participatory ethnographic observation on-site (Michoacán, México).</p> <p>- 5 weeks in the city of Morelia & neighboring town of Capula</p> <p>- 2 weeks in Patzcuaro area</p>
- Stage I. Preliminary research and interviews, - Stage II. Field research & - Stage III. Data analysis, findings & implications	<p><i>Main question: How can designers and other stakeholders in craft ecosystems of Mexico interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?</i></p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>- Analyse challenges and determine implications interaction with artisans</p>	<p>A) Preliminary desk research of relevant literature</p> <p>B) Interviews & non-participant observation</p> <p>C) Sensemaking workshop with 10 participants at the Institute of the Artisan of Michoacán (Morelia, México)</p> <p>D) Cross-referencing of the workshop results with 1 Master Artisan</p>

Table 1. Research stages, questions and data sources

The topics discussed included:

- The role of different stakeholders in the craft sector
- Current interactions and challenges
- Drivers of the interactions
- The role of *design* in craft-making
- Technology and traditional craft
- Challenges of individual stakeholders

Semi-structured interviews helped to maintain consistency while allowing for extended responses and new topics to arise during conversation (Muratovski, 2015). To complement the three semi-structured interviews with designers, a small survey (see *Appendix 4 & 5*) was also conducted as part of *Stage I*. The survey gathered data on the perspective of an additional group of ten designers and NGO collaborators currently involved with the craft sector. Although the sample is too small to be statistically representative, it allowed for a broader overview of current practices in Mexico. The survey used similar questions to the interview script, but in a more concise format. The rest of the interviews took place during the fieldwork in Michoacan, as part of *Stage II* of the project. Adjustments were made to the script based on findings on-site.

Selection of interviewees

A diverse group of participants from each stakeholder group was approached to reflect the variety of opinions, backgrounds and perspectives. All informants agreed to participate under condition of anonymity. *Table 2* shows a list of all interviewees, their role within the craft ecosystem, and a reference name used when quoted throughout the document.

Field visit and ethnographic observation

Understanding the mechanisms, challenges and cultural setting of craft making in Michoacan was crucial to describe current interactions. Ethnographic observation coupled with documentary research was used to analyze local craft production. A “step-in-step-out” (Madden, 2010; Muratovski, 2015) ethnographic approach was used given the short amount of time available on site, this was possible since the researcher was familiar with the setting, having lived previously in the region. The study aimed to provide a broad view of the interactions between participants. Considering the viewpoint of each group represented to better understand their drivers and perspectives.

Stakeholder group	Interviewee	Reference name
Designers	- Design Post-doctoral researcher with 9+ years of experience in social design in Mexico	Designer A
	- Design MA graduate with 6+ years of experience collaborating with traditional artisans	Designer B
	- PhD researcher focused on decolonisation of traditional textile design	Designer C
Other collaborators in craft	- Artist from Capula, Michoacan	Artist A
Artisans	- Copper artisan & re-seller from Santa Clara del Cobre, Michoacan	Artisan A
	- Wooden mask artisan, committee leader & re-seller from Tocuaro, Michoacan	Artisan B
	- Sculptural clay 'Catrina' [skull figure] artisan & association member from Capula Michoacan	Artisan C
	- Traditional pottery artisan from Capula Michoacan	Artisan D
	- Traditional pottery artisan & member of the Artisan Union of Capula, Michoacan	Artisan E
	- Traditional pottery artisan from Tonalá, Jalisco	Artisan F
Government	- Sub-director from the Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan	Government official A
	- Former public official of a municipality in Michoacan	Government official B
	- Public official at regional Institute of Craft	Government official C

Table 2. List of interviewees and reference names

Sensemaking workshop

At the end of the fieldwork, a workshop was arranged with support from IAM's administrative staff (see *Appendix 6*). The goal was to understand the challenges in the interaction between artisans, public institutions and other stakeholders. The role of craft-making in the region was discussed, as well as how to better address the challenges of the sector. The workshop had a duration of three hours and focused on three questions:

1. Why is craft-making important?
2. Why innovate in craft making? & What are the risks of such innovation?
3. What skills are needed to collaborate with artisans and face the challenges of the local craft sector?

10 staff members working inside the IAM participated in the sensemaking workshop. The discussion was facilitated by the author and the dynamic consisted of a series of brainstorming, voting and discussion rounds around each topic. Artisans were scheduled to participate in the workshop, but due to logistics could not attend the session. To make up for this important omission, the results of the workshop were shared with a Master artisan and his feedback was incorporated into the data analysed.

2.2 Documentation and treatment of data

All interviews were documented using a recorder and notes. Participants gave consent to be recorded under condition of anonymity. Survey results were compiled using digital tools, and notes were taken during observation on-site. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data, following Braun & Clark's approach to qualitative data analysis (2006). All the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Initial codes were generated through careful reading of the transcripts, codes were clustered into groups and assigned *theme labels* (see *Appendix 7*). A hierarchy of themes was determined by the author and cross-referenced with the results of the sensemaking workshop, field observation and survey. Insights and implications were then determined based on these results.

2.3 Limitations of the methods used

Observation does not go unnoticed, and participants can change responses and behaviour influenced by their awareness of being observed. Anthropologist Néstor García Canclini—who did important ethnographic research in craft communities of Michoacan during the 1990's—points out that even if we integrate in a community, an external agent modifies the interactions in a system (in interview with Dines, 2015). This makes it difficult to obtain data that is absolutely free from the influence of the researcher. Moreover, since thematic analysis is a method more common in social sciences, the process of classification

and interpretation of data can present a considerable learning curve. However, Braun & Clark indicate that within existing methods for qualitative data analysis, TA is more *“accessible to researchers with little or no experience”* (2006, p. 37).

In addition to inexperience in the methods used, the project started as an exploration without a narrow enough focus and theoretical framework. These issues were tackled as the project progressed with support from the thesis supervisor and advisor. Finally, organizing a sensemaking workshop with participation from members of all stakeholder groups was challenging. The absence of artisans in the dynamic is a very important omission that was not anticipated. The workshop took place at IAM's offices, and was organized with their help, although artisans were invited to participate they could not attend due to issues with transportation. Perhaps, this circumstance points at a need to organize participatory dynamics inside the community, and preferably through local grassroots organizations. Doing so, however, requires long-term trust and acceptance by locals, as identified in previous studies (Garduño García, 2017, p.380).

3. Research context and literature review

In this section, relevant definitions and historical background of craft-making in Mexico and Michoacan are introduced. Then, the relationship between craft, design and development initiatives is discussed, using practical guidelines from international institutions to identify common approaches. Development initiatives are finally contrasted with findings from anthropological and design studies in communities of Mexico and Michoacan, and with criticism found in *postdevelopment* literature. Lastly, emerging roles of design and alternatives for interaction with artisans found in *postdevelopment theory* are outlined. Most notably, Escobar's (2018) notion of *design for autonomy*, or interactions that support the local determination of practices in traditional communities.

3.1 Traditional craft in the Mexican context

As a central definition, the study will differentiate the use of the Spanish word *artesanía*—translated throughout the document as *traditional craft*—from broader use of the word *craft*. International perspectives of *craft* include all kinds of contemporary hand-made products, even initiatives like the *maker* movement that are outside the scope of this project. For a general definition, it is helpful to look at the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) who define *craft products* as:

“Those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, tools or even mechanical means as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products is derived from their distinctive features which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached and socially symbolic and significant.”

(International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, 1997, p. 6)

This definition is broad in scope, and includes all objects in which manual processes are the primary means of production. It can apply to a wide range of products, including—but not limited to—objects that are *“culturally attached and socially symbolic and significant”*. UNESCO's definition, however, does not make a clear distinction between culturally attached objects and other hand-made items. In comparison, Mexico's *National Fund for the Development of Crafts* (FONART) adopts a narrower definition of *artesanía* or *traditional craft object*, understanding it as:

“An object or product of communitarian cultural identity, made by continuous manual processes, aided by rudimentary implements, and other mechanical means that ease certain tasks. The basic and transformed raw materials are generally obtained in the region that the artisan inhabits. The mastery of the traditional techniques, a heritage of the community, allows the artisan

to create diverse objects of different ranges of quality and skill, imprinting in them, also, symbolical and ideological values of the local culture[...] Today, craft production is increasingly aimed for commercialisation."

(FONART, 2015, p. 14)

This second definition by FONART emphasises the relevance of craft as an expression of "*communitarian cultural identity*" determined by the group that produces it. The key aspects distinguishing UNESCO's notion of *craft* from FONART's narrower definition of *traditional craft*—or *artesanía*—in the Mexican context are:

- The central role of craft in the cultural identity of the community
- Craft knowledge is considered intangible heritage of the community
- Craft knowledge is acquired locally through practice
- Culturally relevant symbolic meanings are imprinted in traditional craft objects
- Meaning and use are linked to the socio-cultural context
- Currently, crafts are increasingly aimed for commercialisation

These key distinctions emphasise the role that craft plays within local culture and traditional systems of symbols, meanings and practices. Culture, understood as a *way of living*, encompasses non-material² and material³ expressions (Macionis, & Gerber, 2011), including hand-made objects originally intended for local use. In Mexico, there are multiple variations of craft as a result of regional diversity of customs and traditions. Symbols, practices and their meanings are considered especially relevant in indigenous communities⁴, as expressions of group identity or linked to ritual practices (FONART, 2015).

Also evident in FONART's definition of *traditional craft*, is that in many regions of the country artisanal production is increasingly aimed for commercialisation. In Michoacan, public policy has encouraged tourism in rural and semi-urban communities as a way to improve the regional economy. However, through the implementation of these policies, local cultural production is oftentimes transformed. Critics argue that external interventions can accelerate this change and increase inequalities amongst artisans, this issue has been central in previous design and craft interaction studies in "*developing*" contexts (see: Kang, 2016, 2018), including studies in the state of Michoacan (see: Sosa Ruiz, 2014).

² E.g. ideas, attitudes, values, belief systems, rules, norms, morals, language, festivities, rituals, celebrations, organisations, and institutions.

³ E.g. the physical manifestation of culture in human-made artifacts.

⁴ The term *indigenous communities* will be used throughout the document, although the Spanish collective identifier *pueblos originarios* is more common in recent studies in Latin America. It should be noted, however, that no term currently used is exempt of controversy or universally accepted (Survival, n.d.).

3.2 Background of craft in Mexico and Michoacan

Numerous artisanal communities and traditions can be found throughout Mexico. However, craft-making is mainly practised in rural and semi-urban settings, in areas with important indigenous populations, or in regions with a history of pre-hispanic craft-making. In the case of Michoacan, the *Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan* identifies four indigenous groups that practice craft-making in the state. They are speakers of the P'urhépecha, Nahuatl, Mazahua and Otomí languages. According to the IAM, in parallel to indigenous groups, artisans from the *mestizo*⁵ population also “contribute important and new manifestations [of craft]” (Craft Museum of Michoacan, permanent collection).



Figure 2. Statute of Vasco de Quiroga in the central square of the town of Patzcuaro

Although catholic missionaries documented mesoamerican artisanal traditions upon arrival in the continent, many of the current practices were established in the colonial period or have considerable spanish influence (Canclini, 1993 & Novelo, 2002). The earliest historical record of craft-making in Michoacan comes from the *Relación de Michoacán*—a document attributed to Franciscan missionaries c. 1540. According to anthropologist Néstor García Canclini (1993), this document mentions that the P'urhépecha had a “complex technical division of artisanal labour” in which different regions produced items like hides, cotton work,

reed mats and pottery (p. 74). Historians agree that artisanal techniques were transformed with the introduction of European skills and methods by catholic missionaries. In Michoacan, Vasco de Quiroga—the first catholic bishop in the region, see Figure 1—is credited with assigning local populations a division of Spanish influenced regional crafts around 1550, which influenced current practices in the region (Dietz, 1995; Sosa Ruiz, 2014).

Craft, modernity and the state

According to historians, craft-making did not see major transformations during the colonial and early independence periods of the country's history. Continuing to be practiced in rural areas without notable changes, thanks to the relative autonomy enjoyed by artisans (Canclini, 1993, pp. 73-75). However, this changed towards the end of the Mexican Revolution. In 1921 Álvaro Obregón—president

⁵ In Mexico, the term *mestizo* is used as ethnic identifier of the cultural majority. Its use is tied to diverse criteria—mainly the use of the Spanish language—and was historically associated with biological characteristics, this is, of course, an outdated view from the perspective of contemporary natural sciences. The overall usefulness of the concept of *mestizaje* in present times is a topic of discussion in social sciences (see: Viqueira 2006, 2010).

at the time—celebrated the centenary of Mexico's independence with the organisation of a craft exhibition. According to scholars, this symbolic act marked the establishment of *craft objects* as signifiers of national identity (Canclini, 1993, p. 44; Sosa Ruiz, 2014, p.4).

According to Canclini (1993), around this same period modern artists reinterpreted popular and indigenous "*objects and symbolic systems*" (p.124) and incorporated them into a government-backed narrative of *mestizo* national identity that persists to this day. An identity that aspired to be modern while selectively retaining traditional identifiers and pre-hispanic symbols. Contrasting with this assimilation of popular symbols by the government and the mainstream, the distinctions between traditional manifestations of culture—often labelled as "*popular or decorative arts*"—and "*higher expressions of art*" remains to this day (Novelo, 2002). Furthermore, as mentioned by both Novelo (2002) and Canclini (1993), the adoption of "popular" messages by the mainstream has not translated into improved living conditions, creative freedom, or wider recognition of traditional artisans; especially for members of indigenous groups.

The commodification of craft objects

Artisan communities have not been exempt from the influence of global modernisation and changes in local lifestyles as a consequence. Currently, craft-making is an important source of income linked to tourism in semi-urban and rural communities of Mexico. Canclini detected in a 1993 study in Michoacan that "*changes are taking place... in the social meaning of crafts, and in what way the strategies of reproduction and transformation of capitalist modernisation affects their production, circulation and consumption*" (p.64) Public organisations have also identified these changes, as illustrated by FONART's subcategory of *craft hybrids*; defined as:

"The product that retains some features of identity as a result of a mix of techniques, materials, decorations and symbolic reinterpretations in objects made with artisanal processes that combine certain aspects of cultural dynamism and globalisation, but that do not consolidate as communitarian cultural products. One of the main characteristics is the mixture of diverse elements[...] in such proportions or in such a manner that they[...] integrate into a new category. In some cases, their evolution process manages to configure into an artisanal tradition."

(FONART, 2015, p. 14)

Another phenomenon linked to globalisation identified by Canclini, is the replacement of *utilitarian* craft objects by *manufactured goods* in rural communities, associated to the socioeconomic rise of "*popular classes[...] demanding to participate in 'modern' consumption*" (p.124). Paradoxically, design critic Justin McGuirk (2011) speculates that the interest from members of post-industrial societies—tourists, collectors, and urban consumers of "popular" culture—towards hand-made objects, has been motivated by a "*nostalgia for the pre-industrial*". Craft objects as consumption goods are expected to be authentic within the frame of reference of "*the one who consumes the so-called*

authentic" (Minh-ha, 2018, p. 135). Hence, the commercialisation of objects for cultural consumption has been contemplated by institutions as a tool for rural development. Within these initiatives designers are seen as possible mediators between the "*discontinuous realities*" of *traditional craft-making* and *contemporary consumer markets* (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p.4).

3.3 Development initiatives and interaction between craft and design

Development initiatives have been historically linked to modernisation, the origins of design education in Mexico, and the pursuit of economic growth backed by international organisms—most prominently by the United Nations (Garduño García, 2017, p. 98 & Kang, 2018, p. 58). In the '60s and '70s, nationalistic efforts by Latin American governments reoriented their policies to achieve industrial development. The resolution to strengthen local industries, made it also necessary to train industrial—and other—design professionals⁶. According to Fernández (2006) and Palmarola (2002), the first design programs in Latin America appeared in the 1960s, heavily influenced by the model of Germany's *hfg ulm* design school. As the new discipline took its first steps in the continent, the craft sector was seen as a field in need of modernisation. The efforts to industrialise crafts are evident in the conclusions to 1968's *Seminar of Industrial Design Education in Latin America*, an important gathering for the institution of design education in the region—and an event sponsored by UNESCO. At the summit, participants agreed that:

"In our industrial reality the processes of craft fabrication belongs to an industrial protoform—industry with craft methods[...] What is necessary is a greater scientific knowledge of our society and a greater involvement in its reality."

(as cited in Fernández, 2006, p. 9)

This exemplifies how design in Latin America was partially conceived as an instrument for the development of craft and its industrialisation. However, Palmarola (2002), Fernandez (2006) and Canclini (1993) agree that attempts to create local industries were almost entirely cut short in the 1980s, due to internal political instabilities, increased participation in global markets, and "*foreign debts that generated a new form of dependence*" on "developed" economies (Fernandez, 2006, p.1). Scholars argue that subsequent updates to educational models in design did not reflect the changes in economic policy. Maintaining instead the focus on local industry, possibly explaining current conflicts in the practice of design in Latin American and other "developing" economies (Fernandez, 2006 & Balaram, 2005)⁷. Initiatives that rely on design as a tool for artisanal

6 However, Fernández (2006) points out that in the case of Mexico, design activity predates formal education. In the 1940s internationally trained and self-taught designers—including Clara Porset and Josef Albers—started to introduce design in the furniture industry. Many of these pioneers later became educators.

7 The authors argue that there is a disconnection between design education and practice in Latin America and similar "developing" economies (e.g. design education not matching the reality of local social needs). In other words, design graduates struggle to apply a decontextualized training aimed at industry in contexts with an entirely different set of economic and social requirements.

development are still present in Latin American institutions today. One notable example is *Artesanías de Colombia*, an autonomous organism founded in 1964 in association with Colombia's *Ministry of Economic Development* and UNESCO (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p.85). As part of their global actions aimed at the craft sector, the organisation provides guidelines and recommendations for interaction between industrial designers and traditional artisans in developing contexts. According to their practical guide: *"Designers meet artisans"*, design can be seen as:

"[a] problem-solving methodology to be applied as a tool for development, essentially as a means of removing bottlenecks to viability and easing the move from tradition to modernity."

(Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p.5)

The document does not clarify what the *"bottlenecks"* for the viability of crafts' modernisation are, or why this would be a desirable change from the artisan's perspective. The guide does offer, however, detailed descriptions of prevailing modes of interaction between artisans and designers in Mexico and other Latin American countries.

Approach	Description
Craft preservation	Since craft processes are usually not documented by artisans, this strategy establishes that design methods can be used to preserve craft knowledge, and make it available for future generations.
Design as added value in craft	Designers add value through their knowledge of "methods, materials, tools and processes" (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p. 5). Including the awareness and encouragement of economically relevant and environmentally sustainable practices, models for production, distribution and sales of craft.
Design intervention to reach contemporary markets	Designers assume the role of experts of contemporary global and urban consumers. Initiatives seek to increase the profitability and acceptance of crafts and improve the livelihood of artisans as a consequence. According to this argument, designers can "help evaluate past solutions in terms of contemporary needs, and help select and reject from tradition and modern experience." (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p.5). Strategies include direct participation in the development of new objects, market studies, creation of collective brands, awareness campaigns, and similar market oriented activities. (Gomez Pozo, 2009 & Rojo Cabrera, 2018).
Design intervention to reconnect to local markets	Prioritises the reactivation of local consumption as an alternative to urban and global markets. Identifying that exports can be ephemeral and precarious, and that "successful design intervention has to seek to regenerate local markets, which seem to be overrun with inexpensive machine-made goods" (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p. 7).

Table 3. *Modes of interactions identified in the development literature (sources: Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005; Gomez Pozo, 2009 & Rojo Cabrera, 2018)*

Table 3 outlines approaches for interaction between designers and traditional artisans found in the development literature. With the exception of *craft preservation*, these interactions reflect the idea that existing craft traditions are relevant for *economic development* through the use of “*culture-as-products*” (Radcliffe, 2006). This public policy approach sees culture as an asset for differentiation that can increase competitiveness in a global market (Kang, 2018). The strategies proposed by *Artesanías de Colombia* and UNESCO (2005) place the designer in the role of an expert of production and commercialisation, who collaborates with artisans to cater to the needs of what DeNicola & DeNicola critically call a “*cosmopolitan marketplace*” (2012, p.13).

It is worth noting that the *development goals* set by international organisations are continually evolving as new paradigms arise. Since environmental sustainability and multicultural interaction have become pressing global issues, UN initiatives have in turn modified their initiatives to accommodate for environmentally sustainable and culturally inclusive goals in craft development (Garduño García, 2017, p. 99; Kang, 2018, p. 61). However, the main focus continues to be on *economic growth*—and frequently industrialisation of crafts as a consequence. This has been the central point for criticism of these strategies.

Criticism of development initiatives

Assessment of some of the approaches described above can be found already in Canclini’s (1993) study of Michoacan’s craft sector. In the conclusions to “*Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*”, the anthropologist criticises *preservation approaches* and what he considers the alternative to it, *developmental technocratism*. In his view, preservation entails a “*romantic and conservative*” (p. 109) conception of culture that risks continuing practices which the community might no longer value, since *culture* is dynamic and in constant change. On the other hand, he also considers that the *modernisation of craft-making* implies the incorporation of artisans into industrial production, and possibly to a system of exploitation.

Furthermore, Canclini argues that it is impossible to solve the complex issue of identity and survival of traditional cultures by looking at the *symbolic and economic* dimensions of craft in isolation. In his perspective, if public policy wishes to address the challenges of craft-making today, they would have to start by answering a difficult question: “*What needs to be protected, crafts or artisans?*” (p.111). The author also identifies that the answer to what *crafts* represent today has to come directly from its producers, and not through public initiatives. Since beyond a macroeconomic issue, what is at stake are cooperative modes of traditional production, local cultural identity, and valid alternatives to urban lifestyles.

Other sources of criticism are found in *postdevelopment* theory. Echoing some of Canclini’s ideas, anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2018) considers that *development initiatives* make the problematic assumption that lifestyles in rural and semi-urban communities are a condition that needs to be solved through

modernisation. The role of international organisations like the UN is questioned by Escobar, since initiatives also suppress “*vernacular design and endogenous practices*” (2018, p.6). In other words, development initiatives assess material practices based on their potential commercial value. These arguments refute some of the interaction approaches proposed by *Artesanías de Colombia* and UNESCO (2005), which view *design* as a tool to reach contemporary markets or to reconnect to local ones—see Table 3. From the perspective of *postdevelopment*, there are some challenges and contradictions in these strategies, since:

- Both propositions encourage the commodification of culturally significant objects as the only possibility for continuing *traditional craft* practices in the present.
- In the case of *design intervention to reach contemporary markets*, artisan’s agency is restricted if *vernacular designs* are modified by experts to meet market expectations. In addition, it is implicitly suggested that artisans are incapable of *designing* new and relevant practices if they choose to engage with urban or global markets.
- In the case of *design intervention to reconnect to local markets*, it is difficult to assume that external agents would be more knowledgeable of local consumers than artisans of the region. It also contradicts the previous approach, since this proposition requires designers to be experts of both *contemporary* and *local* markets.⁸

Closely related to the *postdevelopment* perspective, criticism from *decoloniality* focuses on how *development* initiatives potentially replicates colonialist representations (Escobar, 2018, p.62)—perpetuating a dichotomy between *developed and underdeveloped*. Based on this idea, communities are expected to reproduce models of western and urban societies. In the specific case of craft-making, cultural anthropologists DeNicola & DeNicola (2012) consider that the *development approach* subordinates artisans to contemporary and global capital. Since designers adopting the role of experts use a primarily western and modern training to transform traditional craft practices and meet the demands of a “*cosmopolitan marketplace*” (p.13). *Decolonial perspectives* also consider that existing power structures, in the form of governments, academic institutions and private organisations, can potentially marginalise local perspectives in favour of modernisation and economic growth. Escobar proposes that given these circumstances “*caution is thus definitely in order when considering the expansion of design into development*” (2018, p. 61).

Central to *postdevelopment* and *decoloniality* is the idea that there are “many worlds” beyond the hegemonic perspective of modernity driving the *development* discourse (Escobar, 2018, p. 68). Including the “worlds” of rural and semi-urban *traditional communities* that might deviate from this dominant perspective. Advocates for an alternative outside of design practice for *economic development*

The central argument in “Designers meet artisans” is that: “the designer is an important mediator between discontinuous realities” as “Crafts in the developing world remain mostly an activity cast in a predominantly rural matrix, whereas the market is increasingly urban, if not global” (Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005, p. 5). If this is the case, designers could also be assumed to be disconnected from the reality of rural markets.

argue that instead of trying to change these communities, diversity can be valued for its own sake (Garduño 2017, p. 82)⁹.

Moreover, recent studies related to craft and design indicate that paradigms for interaction with traditional artisans are shifting. Initiatives have undergone a historical transformation from *modernisation*, through *development*, and into *postdevelopment* and *cultural development* (Kang, 2018, p. 59). However, research also indicates that in practice, new paradigms coexist with previous ones (Garduño García, 2017, p.79), while engagements between designers and traditional artisans in Mexico continue to proliferate¹⁰.

3.4 Alternative interactions between artisans and collaborators in craft

Postdevelopment also provides a theoretical basis for interactions between designers,, external stakeholders and traditional communities that encourage local culture, autonomy, and plurality. Escobar(2018) draws from Mexican development critic Esteva (2015) to distinguish three scenarios in the determination of the social and cultural life of a collectivity: Ontonomy, Heteronomy and Autonomy—shown in *Figure 3*.

These scenarios illustrate different circumstances for the establishment and negotiation of social norms and cultural practices within a group. The *Ontonomy* scenario exemplifies how communities organise when norms and cultural practices are bound by tradition, as in the practice of craft to satisfy local needs. *Heteronomy* represents how local norms and culture are transformed through expert knowledge and public policy—for example, through top-down development initiatives involving designers and other external collaborators. Finally, Escobar makes a case for an *Autonomous Design* practice that goes beyond these two scenarios and supports *autonomy*, or the self-determination of practices in traditional communities.

Autonomy can involve the defence of local practices, their transformation, or even the creation of new ones within the group. In the Latin American context, *Autonomy* also refers to the situation in which groups can define how to engage with others—including the state—while maintaining the community's capacity for self-creation, self-determination, and self-regulation (Escobar, 2018, p.172). Hence, *Autonomous Design* in practice aims at supporting this internal process, based on the assumption that all communities already practice their own *design*, independently of any expert knowledge. The *design* of a community includes

9 Although Garduño García does not make direct mention of *postdevelopment* or *decoloniality* in her work, common ideas can be found. Particularly, the author draws from Oscar Hagerman's (2010) notion of "many worlds" currently coexisting—similar to Escobar's idea of the pluriverse—in the theoretical framework of "Design as freedom" (2017, p.79).

10 Evidence of this can be found in the curricula of design universities in the country, articles in design magazines, and recent exhibitions throughout Mexico and Latin America. Sources reviewed for this project also support this claim (see: Albarran, 2018; Artesanías de Colombia et al, 2005; Gomez Pozo, 2009; Rojo Cabrera, 2018 & Sosa Ruiz, 2014)

ONTONOMY	HETERONOMY	AUTONOMY
Based on traditional practices	Introduced through expert knowledge	Determined by the community
<i>Norms are established through traditional cultural practices; they are endogenous and place specific and are modified historically through embedded collective processes.</i>	<i>Norms are established by others (via expert knowledge and institutions); they are considered universal, impersonal, and standardized and are changed through rational deliberation and political negotiation.</i>	<i>When the conditions exist for changing the norms from within, or the ability to change traditions traditionally. It might involve the defence of some practices, the transformation of others, and the veritable invention of new practices.</i>

practices like craft-making, their organisation, and their relationship to the environment and others. According to Escobar, practitioners of Autonomous Design, collaborate and support the inquiry of issues by members of the community (pp. 184-185), in search of paths for the transformation and creation of practices that are useful to locals.

Especially relevant for craft-making, is that Autonomous Design assumes that community members are “practitioners of their own knowledge” (Escobar, 2018, p.184). Hence it is essential to understand how local actors view their reality, and collaboratively identify issues and potential ways to address them. Instead of prescribing solutions from an expert position—as is the case in more conventional development approaches.

3.5 Findings and conclusions from the literature

Previous studies have analysed traditional craft practices and the interaction with external collaborators and stakeholders from historical, anthropological and economic points of view. Findings indicate that traditional craft in many parts of Mexico continues to move away from its function in local social practices to objects produced for commercialisation. Moreover, public policy and development initiatives aiming for modernisation, industrialisation and economic development of rural and semi-urban communities accelerate these transformations. Relevant issues for this study identified in research include:

1. The commodification of culturally significant objects used as assets for differentiation and competition in urban and global markets—e.g. *Culture-as-products*.
2. The institutional focus on craft preservation as symbols of a fixed cultural identity—and their appropriation for state purposes. Which potentially ignores the cultural dynamism within traditional communities.
3. The decontextualised and top-down intervention of *industrial designers* in traditional practices, with the objective of catering to contemporary markets.

These issues point at the need for design to become a more inclusive and participatory discipline, in the search for appropriate solutions that emerge in collaboration with grassroots initiatives. In this regard, *postdevelopment* theory

Figure 3. Scenarios for the determination of the social and cultural life of a collectivity. Adapted from Esteva (2015) and Escobar (2018).

provides alternatives for supporting the self-determination of communities, and engaging with local actors to identify issues and solutions that foster local culture and autonomy in decision making. This perspective poses relevant questions for design practice, such as the possibility of design interactions that are not only economically driven, imposed using expert knowledge, or based on replicating existing models of other economies.

4. Stakeholders in the craft ecosystem

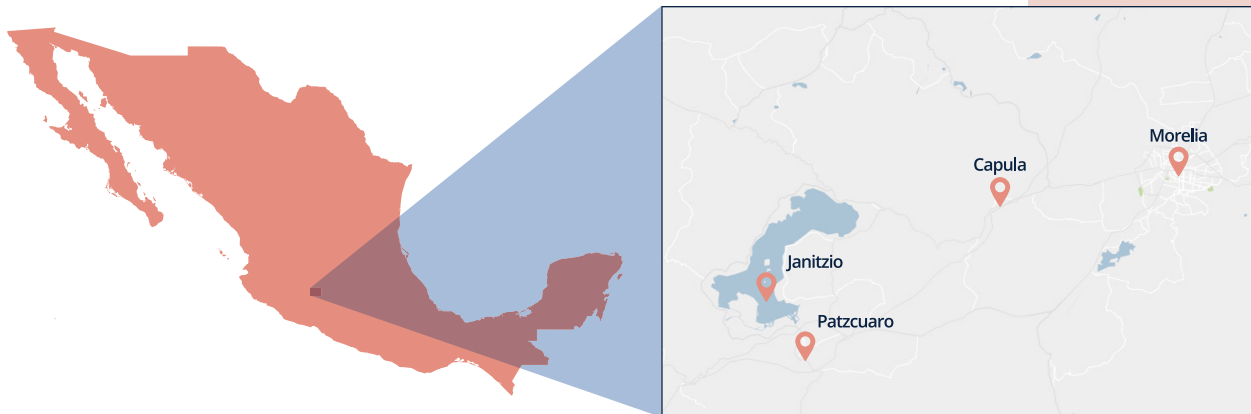


Figure 4. Fieldwork area

Public sector, communities of artisans, and designers and external creatives

This chapter examines the interactions between stakeholders in the ecosystem of craft-making in the Center and Lacustre regions of Michoacán, Mexico; as well as some perspectives of artists and designers interacting with artisans in Mexico. Fieldwork took place in the city of Morelia—the state’s capital—and the towns of Capula, Patzcuaro and Janitzio.

The study examines the interactions between stakeholders in the ecosystem of craft-making in the *Center* and *Lacustre* regions of Michoacán, Mexico; as well as the perspectives of artists and designers interacting with artisans in Mexico. Fieldwork took place in the city of Morelia—the state’s capital—and the towns of Capula, Patzcuaro and Janitzio. Michoacán is a relevant centre for craft making in the country. At the national level, the *“Panorámica del arte popular”* identifies 11 craft techniques found in the region (Sistema de Información Cultural, n.d.), additionally, craft-making is an important economic and cultural activity in a state where 57% of the economy centers in the commerce and service sectors¹¹ (INEGI, 2013, pp. 23-29). According to the database of the *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development* (UNCTAD), Mexico ranks third in terms of craft exports, only behind China and Turkey (2018, p. 26).

¹¹ The rest of Michoacán’s economy focuses, for the most part, on agriculture and raw materials (INEGI, 2013, pp. 23-29).

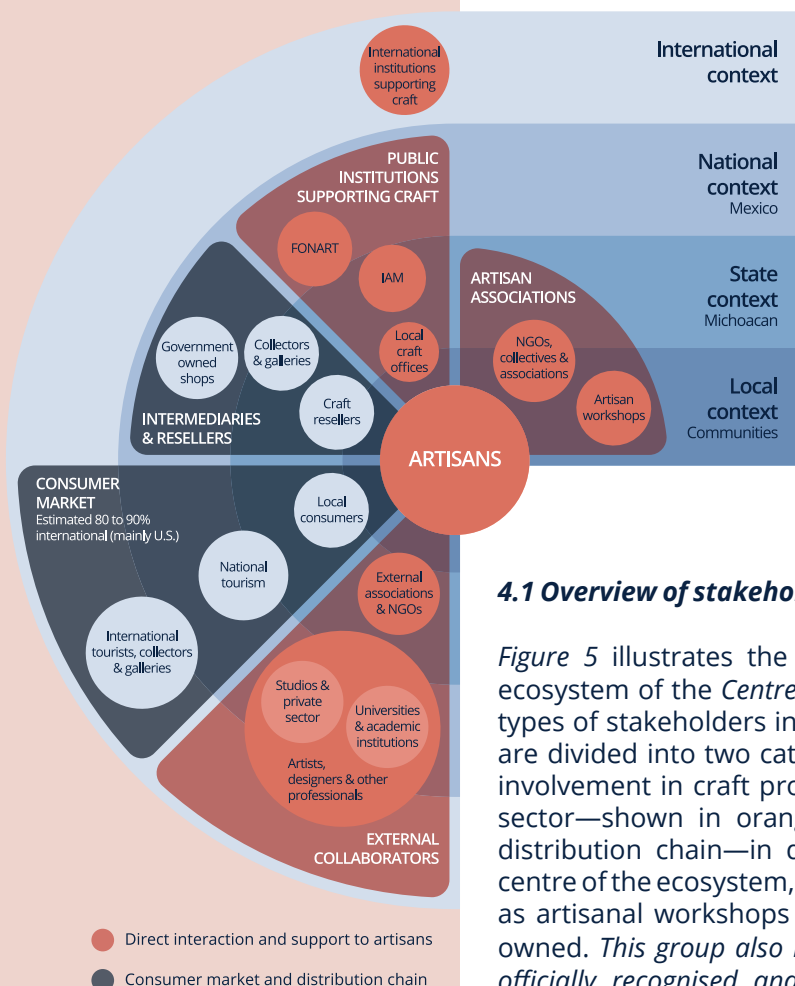


Figure 5. Stakeholders in the craft ecosystem of the Lacustre and Centre regions of Michoacan

4.1 Overview of stakeholders in the craft ecosystem of Michoacan

Figure 5 illustrates the key stakeholders identified in the craft ecosystem of the *Centre* and *Lacustre* regions of Michoacan. Four types of stakeholders interact in traditional craft production, and are divided into two categories: (1) stakeholders that have direct involvement in craft production, or play a supporting role in the sector—shown in orange,—and (2) the consumer market and distribution chain—in dark blue. Individual artisans are at the centre of the ecosystem, followed by grassroots organisations such as artisanal workshops of different sizes—most of them family-owned. *This group also includes artisan associations, which can be officially recognised and legally constituted groups or grassroots initiatives without an official legal status.*

Public institutions at the local, statewide, and national levels provide support and link artisans to other stakeholders in the ecosystem. National institutions receive occasional assistance from international organisms, either from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or from foreign governments and agencies such as UNESCO (Government official A, Personal communication, 2019).

According to public officials, the market for craft production in Michoacan is primarily international. Staff at the Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan (IAM), estimate that 80% to 90% of the current craft output is acquired by tourists, international galleries and collectors (Government Official A, personal communication, January 16, 2019); although there are no official statistics to back this claim. One of the main issues detected during this research is that most artisans do not have direct access to international consumers, and sell most of their objects through intermediaries.

Currently, the majority of distribution channels and spaces are owned by the government, private galleries, and resellers of craft—this was observed on the field and has been identified in previous studies of Michoacan’s craft sector (see: Canclini, 1993; Dietz, 1995 & Felipe Ochoa y Asociados, n.d.)

External collaborators integrate the last stakeholder group, consisting of individuals or groups of professionals who interact with artisans with different objectives. This group includes artists, designers, and other creatives. Regarding design insertion in Michoacan, government officials mention that only a small number of short-term projects with design students have taken place in the past (Government Official A, Personal communication, 2019). Interaction with design professionals is not as common as in other states like Jalisco, Chiapas and Oaxaca (Personal communication, designers A, B, and C & Survey data, 2019). The limited insertion of design in Michoacan could be explained by the absence of industrial design schools in the region.

Through the years, national and international artists have partnered with local craft-makers in some artisanal communities. Interaction between craft-makers and artists is still prevalent in some areas with occasional support by the government. In some instances, creatives decide to move their studios permanently into the communities, having direct and constant interaction with artisans. In the town of Capula, the interaction between *Artist A*—a renowned creative from the state’s capital—and local pottery makers has been successful in improving the economic conditions of artisans. Section 4.2 “*The case of Capula and the Clay Catrina*” provides a detailed description of this interaction. This case could be considered out of the scope of collaboration between artisans and designers, however, given the low insertion of design in Michoacan, it is a valuable source for analysis of long-term interactions. Furthermore, the case is relevant to understand how changes in the *design* of crafts affect traditional practices and what are the implications for the community.



Figure 6. The building housing the museum, exhibition space and offices of the IAM in Morelia's city centre

4.1.1 Public institutions supporting the craft sector

The main organism providing support for the state's craft sector is the *Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan*. The IAM (Figure 6) is a decentralised public organisation dependant on the state's government and located in the capital city of Morelia. The general objective of the organisation is to coordinate and advance actions and programs for the support, development, and promotion of artisanal products (Instituto del Artesano Michoacano, 2016, p. 1). The institution functions as a link to the *National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts* (FONART), the public organism supporting artisans nationwide. The IAM receives funding from FONART and interprets their programs for application in the state. Therefore, it links federal government efforts to craft communities, with the assistance of small craft offices in some municipalities.

A series of administrative areas integrate the IAM; their primary tasks are illustrated in Figure 7. As shown in the diagram, the *Commercialisation* department is in charge of acquiring craft pieces directly from artisans or in craft competitions, and sell them at state-owned spaces. The *Operations* division organises competitions, as well as artisanal exhibitions and fairs. They are also in charge of

overseeing financing programs for artisans. Lastly, *Art & support for the craft sector* organises training courses and manages sales of raw materials at affordable prices. The area also oversees the *New designs & research* department (IAM, 2016). IAM officials consider that the internal design department is a promising initiative, yet budget restrictions limit its potential. Currently, outsourcing agencies execute most design tasks required by the institution.

"That is one of the missing links in the organisation, we have always wanted to have a stronger department of new designs. Currently, we have it for textiles. We could also do the same thing with wood or other materials [but] we have a very tight budget."

(Government official A, January 16, 2019)

The organisation can define its specific objectives and programs. However, the allocation of resources for essential activities like training, documentation, and research depend on the goals determined by the federal and state administrations in turn—which normally change every six years. According to public officials, these circumstances make strategic planning and maintain long term objectives a challenge. Artisans are aware of the constant shift in

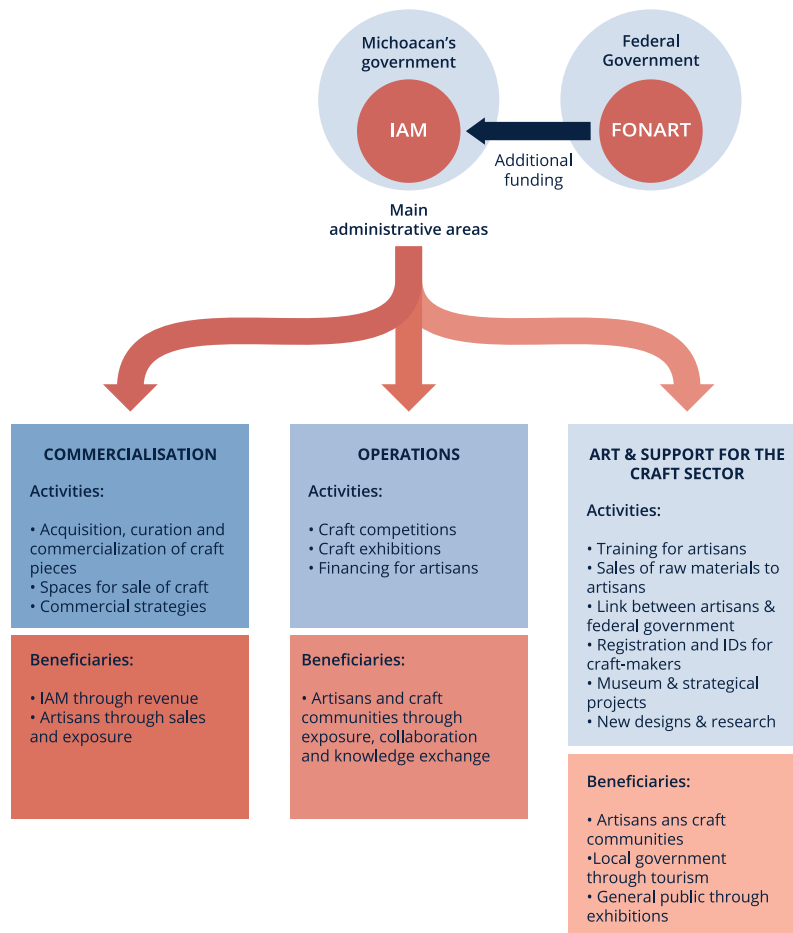


Figure 7. Institute of the Artisan of Michoacan's main areas and activities

institutional priorities with each new government, and consider that it creates uncertainty in interactions with the IAM.

"The centre [IAM] is currently going through a restructuring process due to the change in the federal government. This process is very common[...] and might impact the continuity of programs or even bring significant changes to the goals and aims of the institution."

(Government official A, January 16, 2019)

Public initiatives and craft for tourists and collectors

As pointed out by Novelo (2012), and Canclini (1993), artisanal production and tourism are increasingly intertwined in Mexico. An approach that is also embraced by public institutions in Michoacan. Although the loss of material expressions of culture is the primary concern for the IAM, they currently do not run programs for the research and documentation of utilitarian craft techniques. Focusing instead on the commercialisation of decorative arts in their sale spaces.



Figure 8. Decorative arts & Utilitarian craft from the institutional perspective

According to public officials, there is a “more natural” for the continuity of traditional practices in *decorative arts*. International collectors and tourists are the primary consumers of this type of pieces.

“Decorative arts have an easier path for continuity, but utilitarian craft is at a higher risk of being lost. A lot has already been lost, especially in the last ten years. [We] consider that our most natural market is from the United States[...] most of our clients are either galleries or individuals from the US, roughly 80 to 90%.”

(Government official, January 16, 2019)

From the perspective of the institution, *decorative arts* are a subcategory of traditional craft that emphasises the personal expression of artisans, linked to traditional practices and local culture. *Utilitarian crafts*, on the other hand, are traditional everyday objects that originate from the lifestyle and customs of rural and semi-urban communities. *Figure 8* lists the main differences between the two types of craft objects, according to the IAM.

According to participants approached on the field, the focus on external consumers is more evident in government-owned sale spaces and private galleries than in shops owned by artisans. The general perception is that international visitors are more likely to afford the higher prices of intricate and labour-intensive craft pieces (Artist A; Artisans B & C; Government Officials A & B; Artist A, Personal communication, 2019). Since the commercialisation of craft is an essential economic activity in the region, “*cultural tourism*”¹² has been pushed by the government as a strategy to attract visitors to craft communities. Public programs like *pueblos mágicos*¹³—*magical or enchanted villages*—aim to increase the appeal of communities through infrastructure projects that maintain an attractive image for visitors. According to public officials, in areas with a constant flow of tourists craft sales allow public institutions to maintain a steady income and remain operational while encouraging local economic activity.

¹² Cultural tourism is defined by Mexico’s tourism office as “A trip motivated by knowing, understanding and enjoying the set of distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual. and affective features or elements that characterize a society or social group of a specific destination” (Secretaría de turismo, n.d., p.18)

¹³ According to guidelines for incorporation and permanence in the program, *Pueblos mágicos* are: “localities that need to be oriented to strengthen and optimize the rational usage of their cultural, and natural resources and attractions... [and] the development of tourism products and marketing... these actions will contribute to the growth of the tourism market” (Secretaría de Turismo, 2014, p. 3).

Public institutions' view of external design collaborators

Staff members at the IAM are cautious of interactions between external collaborators and local artisans—including designers—since they consider the preservation of traditional techniques and objects their main priority. In the past, the institution has supported research projects with design students from other parts of the country. However, they have not observed substantial benefits or improvements in the communities after these encounters. Government officials argue that although designers and artists can help to raise the commercial value of craft objects, changes motivate craft-makers to shift away from traditional practices. From an institutional perspective, this harms local culture, and can potentially cause the industrialisation of small-scale family workshops.

"You can modify a piece to raise the commercial value. This change might make it more fashionable or have an impact on consumer taste, but if an artisan continues on this path, he/she will very likely stop doing more traditional pieces. Our goal is to guarantee a better income for the artisans work, but we cannot provoke that they change what they are currently working on; otherwise, culture starts to dilute."

(Government official A, January 16, 2019)

Government officials attribute unsuccessful past experiences to two factors: (1) short and decontextualised collaborations, and (2) the imposition of the designers "vision" onto local artisans, who are not treated as co-creators or equal collaborators. Concerns also include the designers' lack of awareness of the historical and socio-economic factors surrounding local practices. Moreover, government officials consider that decontextualised perspectives threaten regional cultural identity.

"They [artists and designers] might have preconceived ideas and act based on that, but there is no background, not even historical background. Sometimes they want to impose[...] some people come as outsiders, and they do manage to impose certain designs, unfortunately distorting the origin[...] I think preservation is critical."

(Government official B, January 30, 2019)



Figure 9. Sensemaking workshop at IAM

Sensemaking workshop

A workshop was conducted with assistance from staff at the IAM. The main goal was to collaboratively identify, discuss, and make sense of (1) the role of craft in communities of the *Lacustre* and *Centre* regions, (2) the value and risk of innovation in craft, and (3) the skills and attitudes needed from institutions, external collaborators and artisans to collaboratively face the challenges of the sector. In the workshop, ten staff members currently working at the institution—sub-directors, department leads, analysts, and field staff—participated by answering four questions related to the issues mentioned above. Participants then prioritised answers through voting, and results for each question were discussed by the group. Although artisans were scheduled to participate in the workshop, they could not attend due to logistical issues. However, a local Master artisan provided additional feedback on the workshop results—for details and full results, see *Appendix 6*.

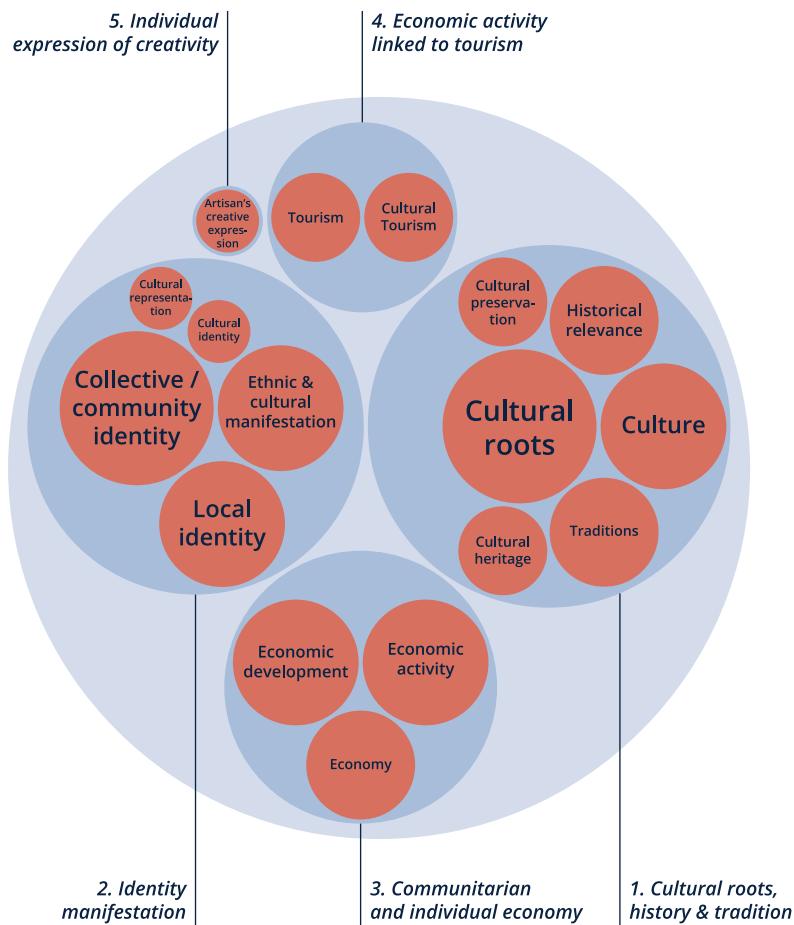


Figure 10. Workshop results: Why is craft making important?

Regarding the role of craft in traditional communities (Figure 10), participants indicated that craft is relevant as (1) an activity linked to local culture, history and tradition, (2) a collective expression of local identity, and (3) an important economic activity for individuals and communities—increasingly linked to tourism. Additional comments pointed out the particular relevance of craft as a cultural manifestation in indigenous communities, as well as an ancestral trade linked to a way of viewing, understanding, and relating to the world.

Concerning innovation in traditional craft (Figure 11) participants indicated that it allows to (1) improve competitiveness and meet market demands, and pointed out the relevance of (2) encouraging local innovation by artisans. In further discussion, all participants agreed on the importance of innovation to face the environmental issues of the craft sector, especially concerning the overexploitation of local raw materials.

Additionally, negative implications and risks of innovation in the craft sector (Figure 12) were also addressed, the main concerns expressed by participants included (1) loss of local identity and culture, and (2) lack of emphasis in initiatives supporting the preservation and continuation of existing techniques.

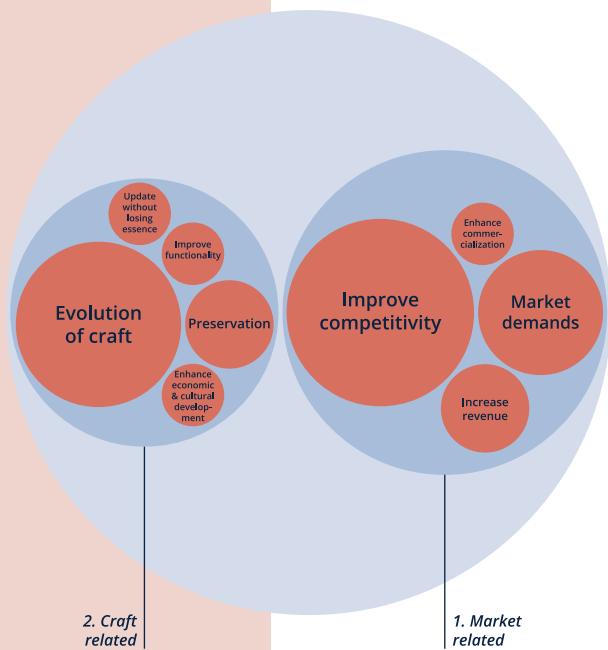


Figure 11. Workshop results:
Why innovate in craft making?

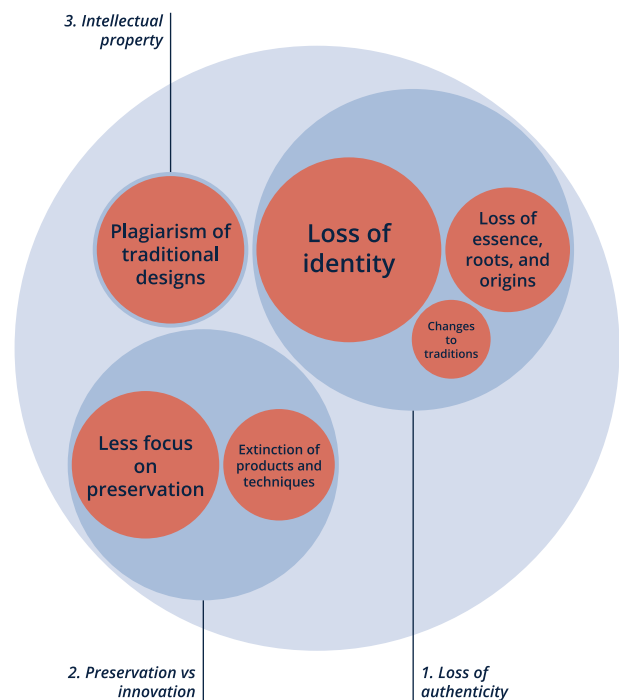


Figure 12. Workshop results:
What are the risks of such innovation?

Finally, Table 4 summarises responses regarding the skills and attitudes of external collaborators, institutions, and artisans required to face the challenges of the sector. During the closing discussion, concerns centred on the loss of local identity when changes in traditional craft-making take place. According to participants, external collaborators who interact with artisans should adhere to local initiatives and find solutions through co-creation.

From external collaborators	From institutions	From artisans
<i>Sensibility and respect towards artisans</i>	<i>Facilitation of research activities to tackle local issues</i>	<i>Curiosity, openness and interest in collaboration and change</i>
<i>International perspective</i>	<i>Focus on respect and ethical interactions</i>	<i>Resources and support to communities to encourage grassroots initiatives</i>
<i>Collaboration with institutions</i>	<i>Support to artisan initiatives</i>	

Table. 4 Summary of results from designer's survey

A local Master artisan provided further comments on the workshop results. Mentioning that innovation can cause disruptions in traditional communities, since the natural process of transformation of cultural practices is gradual and barely noticeable. Furthermore, the artisan indicated that local innovation should be a more relevant topic and pointed out the importance of competitions and artisan encounters to encourage grassroots developments. Additionally, the artisan considered that the most critical role of external collaborators and institutions is facilitating research activities that address local issues, such as scarcity of raw materials—in agreement with the IAM staff—and the overall state of the local craft sector.

Figure 13. SWOT analysis of public institutions supporting artisans in Michoacan

INTERNAL	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link between different stakeholders in the ecosystem • Can oversee craft production at the state level 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited budget and internal capabilities • Monopoly over sales infrastructure for international consumers • Lack of transparency in processes
	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with other stakeholders to support initiatives that the communities find valuable • Support of continuous training and knowledge exchange between artisans 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional objectives constantly change with federal and state administrations • Distrust from some community members
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

Summary of findings from public institutions supporting the craft sector

Figure 13 is a Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses and Threats (SWOT) matrix summarising findings related to the role of public institutions in the craft ecosystem. Results indicate that public institutions fulfil a crucial role in linking several stakeholders and collaborators. However, institutions can often be unpredictable and unstable in the focus of their support to artisans.

Furthermore, institutional budget and capabilities restrict the implementation of programs for continuous training and exchange between artisans as well as research of the conditions of the sector. Instability is caused by a constant shift in institutional objectives, which are conditioned by decisions at the federal and state levels of government. These issues, along with perceived corruption cause distrust from artisans. The relationship between institutions and craft-makers is also damaged by inequalities in distribution and sales mechanisms. The following chapter describes these and other issues in detail, based on field observation and testimonies by artisans.

4.1.2 Artisans in communities of Michoacan

As identified in the literature review, craft-making in Michoacan continues to move away from its role in local practices and into the making of objects for commercialisation (Canclini, 1993; Dietz, 1995; Novelo, 2012 & Sosa Ruiz, 2014). Initiatives from institutions and external collaborators aim at improving economic conditions, in some cases with unexpected consequences for some community members. To understand the diversity of perspectives and identify issues in the interactions in the ecosystem, artisans from different backgrounds were approached at their selling spaces and workshops in Morelia, Capula, Patzcuaro, and Janitzio.

Transformations in craft making, from objects for local needs to objects for commercialisation

In order to adapt to quickly changing environments in traditional communities, artisans are modifying their practices to sustain and improve their income. Craft-makers approached agree that traditions and culture are dynamic, however, they recognize that transformations in craft used to be gradual and barely noticeable. According to participants approached, the current rate of changes can have unpredictable consequences for the communities. Additionally, unsuccessful government initiatives that push for changes in traditional objects can damage the relationship with the artisans involved.

“Craft itself is in constant renewal and evolution, but it is a slow process that is barely noticeable throughout the years. When this change accelerates, we could call it an innovation[...] even if the market accepts it, it creates a significant impact within the community and in the relationship with the institutions that support it.”

(Artisan F, February 22, 2019)

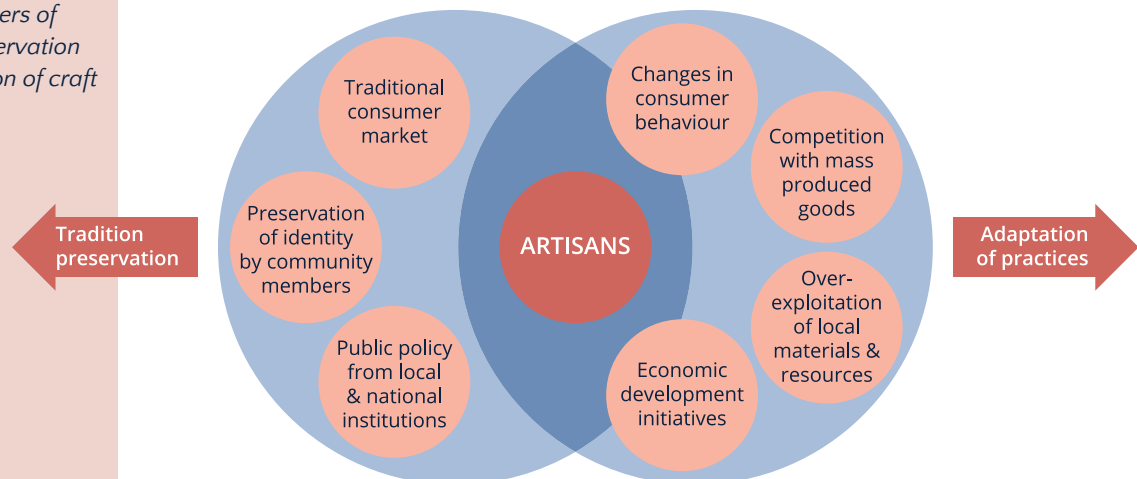
As discussed in the literature review, development initiatives are criticised for introducing new practices through external expertise. However, field observation indicates that changes in the design of craft objects and new commercial practices can also be initiated within the community, since artisans struggle to stay competitive in a market with numerous alternatives of mass-produced goods. On this issue, a copper artisan in the town Patzcuaro mentioned:

“Back in the day, we didn't use to make comales [a type of grill] or any of the other things that you see. We would only make cazos [large pots]. Me and other artisans started making new things, both small and big, flower vases, jars, and others. Because we sell them better.”

(Artisan A, January 24, 2019)

The process of adaptation by artisans exemplifies that changes in *traditional craft* are not only caused by interaction with external collaborators. Change can also occur as an internal reaction to transformations in rural and semi-urban contexts. The artisans observed in the field approach traditional practices in different ways, some participants focus on repeating established canons, while other craft makers are interested in pushing the boundaries of their techniques. This diversity was also pointed out by design practitioners with experience in other communities in Mexico. *Figure 14* lists different factors identified—internal and external—that drive preservation and adaptation efforts by artisans.

Figure 14. Drivers of tradition preservation and adaptation of craft practices



“There are many types of artisans[...] there are those who replicate an existing object every day, and even in that case, each piece has distinctive features. There are newcomers and master craft makers[...] There are also others who may be more like an artisan/ designer, who like to innovate and make variations.”

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

Although the *design* of new objects that deviate from tradition can be a competitive advantage in craft as a *commercial activity*, it can go against craft as a *cultural practice*. New types of objects deviate from established techniques, methods, *vernacular designs*, or symbolic patterns learned from previous generations. Considering the needs of populations in areas with low employment, the negotiation of preserving or adapting practices in response to local conditions is challenging even for members within the community.

"Innovation has great possibilities because it implies a close relationship with the market[...] It aims to appropriate a product towards usability or purpose[...] since you have to acknowledge the object's place in present times. On the other hand, traditional craft involves repetition, because it maintains a process and keeps a series of designs that in some cases, have pre-hispanic origins. So, it is a situation that sometimes is hard to balance. To what extent to remain traditional? or, To what extent do we have to stop doing that?"

(Artisan F, February 22, 2019)

Even in cases where consumers accept new craft objects, the change can have negative implications within the community. Sudden hikes in demand increase production and cause overexploitation of local materials. Scarcity of resources pushes artisans to seek substitute materials, tools, and techniques, introducing new variables to practices that have remained relatively stable for generations. Artisans approached see a need for research, documentation, and diagnose of these transformations.

"Increasingly, artisans are faced with new materials brought from new places[...] testing is needed to check what works, what doesn't, what needs to be improved, etcetera[...] To face this situation, studies related to craft production should be constant, to keep things up to date and have a constant diagnostic."

(Artisan F, February 22, 2019)

Overexploitation of materials—which traditionally are locally sourced—is a growing problem in the communities visited (Artisans A & F; Designers A & B; Government official A; Personal communication, 2019). In the case of Capula, pottery and earthenware makers are still able to source clays locally. However, if production continues to grow unchecked, this situation could easily change. In other nearby pottery-making communities, urbanization demands have caused stricter regulations for the use of land and the extraction of clays as a consequence.

"Sourcing raw materials is one of the main problems for artisans nowadays[...] In the case of pottery makers in Capula, some of them are still able to go and extract their clays, this is not the case for us[...] because of increased regulations related to housing and the need to have more space for this purpose. Considering this, I wonder how much longer are we going to be able to continue working with these materials?"

(Artisan F, February 22, 2019)

A similar situation takes place in Santa Clara del Cobre, a town famous for its copper work. In Santa Clara, the exploitation of minerals by transnational companies causes unrest in the community. Copper artisans currently rely on recycling material from pipes, cables, and other sources, instead of using materials available in the vicinity.

"The material is getting quite expensive[...] Nowadays, most of the time, we use recycled materials, copper cable, copper pipe, etc. We have a mine over here, the mine of Inguarán. A very big mine, currently been exploited by a Canadian company. Santa Clara is a place rich in minerals, but we don't get access to them."

(Artisan A, January 24, 2019)

Even in towns like Capula, where soil for clay work is still widely available, artisans struggle to handle the price fluctuations of exported pigments and glazes. Materials introduced as part of initiatives to modernize traditional production methods in pieces using more industrial techniques and materials.

"The clay I can get here [locally], but I can't predict the changes in the price of glazes and pigments. Those are the most expensive materials, and they are imported."

(Artisan D, January 31, 2019)

Some of the artisans interviewed on the field see a possibility to face these issues with the support of institutions and other collaborators in the craft ecosystem. The need for training, research of materials, techniques and sustainable alternatives in production methods were pointed out by several participants as important tasks. However, past and ongoing interactions with institutions and external collaborators have been met with mixed reactions within the communities, creating an environment of distrust and uncertainty.

Artisans' view of external design collaborators

The opinions of collaborations with external stakeholders was divided among the artisans approached. Perceptions ranged from participants that view external creatives as hostile agents, to craft-makers who consider that exchange and interaction with other disciplines are necessary to expand current craft knowledge and make new connections with other disciplines. The most frequent criticisms of interactions with external agents identified during fieldwork are: (1) Lack of knowledge of craft techniques, history, meanings, and value for the community (2) limited and unequal benefits or impact for the community, and (3) unfair recognition and credit in partnerships.

"It's like those artists that go to communities where they make embroidery, but they don't learn. They don't know the basics or how to do it themselves, and that is what's wrong. That they take advantage [of artisans], they use our work and don't bring anything good for the community."

(Artisan A, January 24, 2019)

Other artisans were indifferent, finding that professional designers had little value to add to craft practices. This group considered that customers are looking for well-known and established traditional items, with a long history in the region.

"Of course, some people want a different cut in their clothes, but most people come to Patzcuaro in search of traditional things. Things that are typical of the region."

(Artisan B, January 24, 2019)

On the other hand, positive views on collaboration with external stakeholders centred on three potential benefits: (1) exchange of ideas and networking between disciplines, (2) the exploration of new paths that can benefit the community, and (3) facing the uncertainty of transformations in traditional communities and local craft practice.

"It's also important to make new paths, and both things are perfectly valid[...] that is how the world finds new and different ways to connect. We are small circles that at the same time link to each other. For the most part, institutions will demand that artisans maintain their work process and materials[...] there's a contradiction there, in that narrow vision from institutions. I think these issues should be kept more open because it might apply to some cases but not all of them."

(Artisan F, February 22, 2019)

As pointed out before, collaboration with designers is not common in Michoacan. However, other stakeholders in the craft ecosystem continue to impact craft production in the region—such as artists, as discussed in section 4.2 “The case of Capula and the Clay Catrina”. Furthermore, challenges in the interaction with public institutions were also consistently mentioned by artisans on the field.

Interactions with the public sector.

Distrust of institutions and unequal access to markets

Among current public programs, artisans are receptive to training involving experienced craft makers, and to local craft competitions. According to participants, both activities allow them to work on more complex and creative projects. This helps to maintain high-level skills, and to create spaces for interaction with more experienced Master artisans. Although public officials agree with the importance of these programs, budget restrictions and shifting government objectives restrict widespread implementation. Public institutions also link artisans to other stakeholders who provide research and support—such as academic centres and universities.

"[Institutions] help in some cases, in the process of linking with Universities or other academic institutions for topics related to the use of materials, sustainability and things like that[...] Also in the diagnostic [of craft], which is something that requires documentation."

(Artisan F, January 16, 2019)

However, the relationship between artisans and institutions in Michoacan is complicated by factors including (1) perceived corruption, (2) lack of transparency in processes, (3) unclear institutional objectives, and (4) unequal access to programs. Artisans approached expressed distrust of institutional processes.



Figure 15. Artisan selling her products on the streets

Including concerns of unfair compensation for craft pieces acquired by the government and unequal access to markets.

Craft-making as a commercial activity linked to tourism, has been embraced as a mechanism for job creation in towns across Michoacan. Artisans from indigenous communities interviewed in the town of Patzcuaro consider that craft is an essential tool for self-employment in regions where the government has not created the conditions for new jobs to emerge (Artisan B, Personal communication, 2019). Artisan B mentions that craft sales give him and other

artisans the possibility to support their families. Without these opportunities—Artisan B says—more community members could turn to illegal activities as an alternative¹⁴.

"I'm glad artisans can use it [craft-making] as a means for sustaining their families. Because it is an income that helps us to stay away from 'dirty' businesses."

(Artisan B, January 24, 2019)

¹⁴ It is important to point out that, Michoacan has been significantly affected by organized crime violence, and has a history of regional drug production and traffick (Maldonado Aranda, 2013).

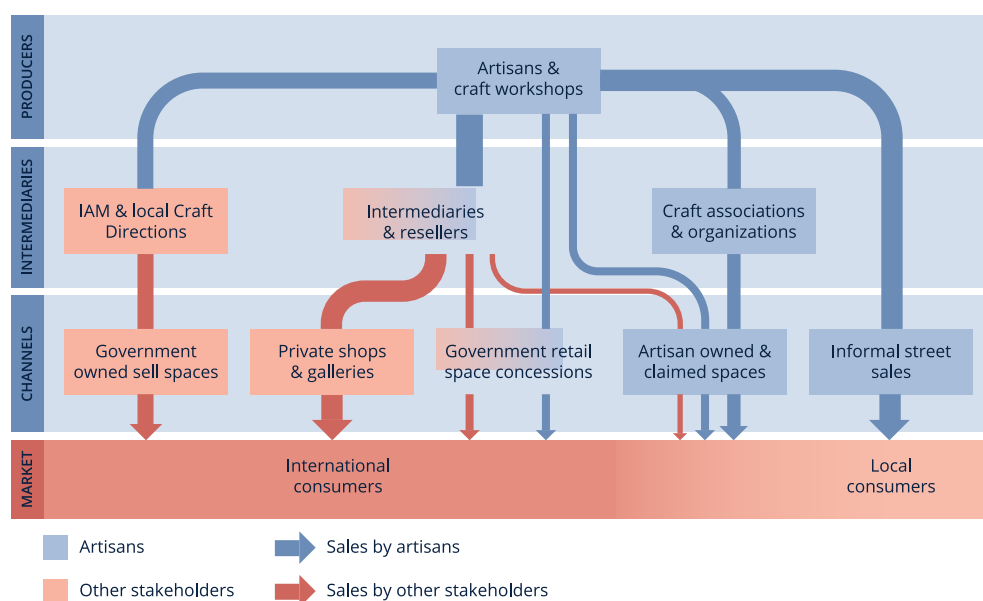


Figure 16. The flow of artisanal products and distribution channels in craft sales

Although craft is an important local economic activity, only artisans who can access spaces for selling craft items have relatively stable incomes. The majority of artisans have to interact with intermediaries and retailers. Intermediaries set prices and control galleries, shops and a large percentage of the flow of artisanal goods. The main spaces for craft sales in Michoacan—including online sales—are owned by the state, followed by private galleries, and lastly by grassroots craft collectives and associations. In the city of Morelia and the towns of Capula and Patzcuaro, artisans that cannot access these spaces, sell their products on the streets¹⁵ (see *Figure 15*) or have to bargain with intermediaries. *Artisan D*, a traditional pottery maker from Capula, mentions that the interaction with resellers is one of his main struggles, forcing him to accept lower prices and have an unpredictable income.

"I sell most of my pottery work to a person from Durango [a state over 800 km away from Michoacan], but he always changes the prices every time we meet... I sometimes try to sell at the local fair events, but they charge too much in fees, I rather sell on Sunday's market, on the square. There I can set the price directly with the customers."

(Artisan D, January 31, 2019)

Figure 16 depicts the flow of craft products in Michoacan. As shown in the figure, some artisans sell their work directly to the IAM or to local craft directions. Pieces are acquired from a curated selection of artisans and from winners at competitions. In this system, institutions themselves function as intermediaries, since larger private and public organizations have broader commercial reach than individual artisans (Artisan B & Designer C, Personal communication, 2019). In order to have control over distribution channels and keep direct contact with consumers, numerous artisans turn to sell informally on the streets. In a few cases, artisans receive concessions for selling goods in spaces owned by municipal governments—see *Figure 17*.

For artisans who have access to state-owned spaces, concessions were given years ago, in some cases dating back to a few generations in their families. The issue of intermediaries and resellers in the Mexican craft sector has been documented in previous studies (see: Canclini, 1993; Dietz, 1995 & Felipe Ochoa y Asociados, n.d.), and public officials on the field express awareness of it (Government Official A, personal communication, January 16, 2019). Officials mention that it is difficult to distinguish between real artisans selling crafts, and people who pretend to be craft-makers, who sell items



Figure 17. Artisan selling craft objects in a space owned by the municipality

¹⁵ Government officials are aware of informal sales and tolerate the situation. The institution added a disclaimer for police and other authorities on the backside of the credentials offered to artisans registered at the IAM. The disclaimer instructs officers to treat the artisans in a respectful manner if they are found selling illegally on the streets.

purchased at small workshops, usually through bargaining.

"If there are 450 or 500 artisans in my opinion half of them are resellers[...] But in this case, there is not much we can do, because it's pretty hard to make a living, so they turn to sell craft[...] When you see a stall where they sell five different types of craft, it is hard to believe that one artisan can work on so many techniques."

(Government official C, January 24, 2019)



In the case of artisans who have been allowed to make use of state-owned sale spaces, distrust of the government and the need to retain control over buildings is palpable. In order to maintain ownership, concession holders invest in the maintenance and care of their spaces, as observed in *Casa de Los Once Patios* (Figure 18) a major state-owned retail space in Patzcuaro.

"This building is government-owned. We have to pay for the maintenance because if we let the government have all the control, they would choke us."

(Artisan A. January 24, 2019)

Figure 18. Casa de los Once Patios, government owned sell space in Patzcuaro

In contrast to artisans in *Casa de Los Once Patios*, indigenous craft-makers in nearby *Palacio de Huitzimengari* (Figure 19) struggle to legitimate their use and access to retail spaces. The building they occupy is a space shared by groups from several nearby indigenous communities, without any government support. Artisans in *Palacio de Huitzimengari* are organized in a grassroots movement and make use of the large house in the town's city centre since 1989. A building used to belong to Antonio de Huitzimengari, son of the last emperor of the P'urhépecha¹⁶ people (Jiménez, 2002, p. 136). Although the government has not recognized the group's right to use the space, communities use it as a multi-purpose centre and indigenous school. Activities at *Palacio de Huitzimengari* include language courses, commercialization of craft, and community gatherings and cultural events (Chávez, A. G., 2016). The dispute over the building is a source of friction between artisans and government, as pointed out by *Artisan B*—a mask maker who owns a small stall in the building.

¹⁶ P'urhépechas are the more numerous indigenous group in the region, and the one most commonly associated with the state of Michoacan.



Figures 19. Palacio de Huitzimengari, building occupied by indigenous groups and used as a school, a space for selling craft, and for community events.



Figures 20. Wooden mask in-progress on the floor of a craft shop in Palacio de Huitzimengari.

"We are about 14 communities sharing the space[...] This is a building owned by the communities [but] the problem is that we cannot invest more in it. And the government doesn't want to invest in it either, because of lack of legal certainty."

(Artisan B, January 24, 2019)

The legality of the use of the building is questioned by authorities, who claim that indigenous artisans misuse the space. About this situation, a local public official mentioned the following:

"The indigenous community took Huitzimengari, it has been seized, they have taken ownership over it, and it is very hard to get back that building. And they do sell craft from the region, but I also think there's some craft from Chiapas over there. It will be super interesting to rescue that building to be able to have the same thing, but in a different way, because it's dirty and it's not been taken care of."

(Government official C. January 24, 2019)

Inequalities in the access to sale spaces affect most artisans in Michoacan. However, indigenous craft-makers at *Palacio de Huitzimengari* face the most challenging conditions. The government appears to remain indifferent to their efforts to legitimize the use of the building, or to give them access to other spaces. *Huitzimengari's* artisans do not receive support or funding for the building's maintenance and don't have the possibility of investing in it. Despite these circumstances, artisans have managed to resist and keep using the building for over 30 years, providing in the same space education and events benefiting the indigenous communities.

INTERNAL	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft is an important tool for self-employment in rural and semi-urban communities • Artisans adaptability to the changing environment 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of market demand and craft output drives overexploitation of local resources
	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other potential uses for sale spaces (e.g. as centres for community exchange, as done by indigenous groups) • Designers and other external collaborators learn, research, and co-design with the community to adapt to changing conditions and challenges 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in rural contexts • Competition with mass-produced goods • Unequal access to sale spaces and consumers • Reliance on intermediaries • Unequal treatment of indigenous communities • Decontextualized, brief, and unequal partnerships with external stakeholders • Introduction of materials and technology outside the control of the community
POSITIVE		NEGATIVE

Figure 21. SWOT analysis of artisans in communities of Michoacan

Summary of findings from artisans in communities of Michoacan

Figure 21 summarises the identified issues for artisans, as well as areas of opportunity. Local craft makers continue to adapt their practices as public policy focuses on tourism and cultural consumption. This strategy has had mixed implications. On the one hand, it has allowed craft activity to continue and grow, maintaining sources for self-employment in rural areas. On the other hand, according to artisans it has caused additional challenges, such as:

- Unequal access to sale spaces and international consumers
- Overexploitation of local raw materials as demand increases in some communities
- Introduction of substitute materials out the control of local artisans

Some craft-makers see collaboration with other stakeholders in the ecosystem as a tool to face these challenges. However, based on past experiences, participants find little evidence of substantial benefits in short-term interactions with designers and external creatives. The main challenges identified in collaborations are:

- Maintaining control over decisions related to local practices within the community
- External collaborator's limited knowledge of techniques, history, meanings, and value of traditional craft
- Short interactions are associated with limited benefits for community members
- Unequal partnerships and recognition of artisans

The interaction with public institutions also presents some challenges for artisans. As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter, distrust and lack of transparency in public processes, shifting long-term objectives, and unequal access to programs and markets are the main areas of conflict. Intermediaries—including public institutions—own the majority of sale spaces and points of access to international consumers. Artisans have to accept the conditions set by intermediaries if they want to reach these markets. Limited access to sale spaces also restricts the artisan's control over the curation of products offered.

Finally, indigenous artisans struggle to legitimise their use of spaces. The occupation of a building in Patzcuaro shows that spaces are not only essential to sell products, but that they can be used for other purposes by the community. Mixed-use is exemplified in *Palacio de Huitzimengari*, as the building functions as a sales space, school, and centre for social events for locals.

4.1.3 Designers collaborating with artisans in Mexico

A survey of ten participants was conducted (see *Appendix 5*) along with three in-depth semi-structured interviews, to have an overview of the opinions of designers currently interacting with artisans in Mexico. As mentioned before, collaborations between artisans and designers are not as frequent in Michoacan as in other parts of the country. For this reason, participants from different other regions were contacted for both survey and interviews. Although the sample size is too small to be representative of the general population of designers, it supported the assessment of thoughts and opinions. In parallel, the in-depth interviews allowed for extended responses and to further explore current issues.

Table 5 shows a summary of the survey responses. Regarding the general need for collaboration between artisans and designers, all participants considered that interactions are either necessary (50%) or that the need depends on

	Yes	No	Depends on circumstances/ context
<i>There is a need for designers to collaborate with artisans</i>	50%	0%	50%
<i>Design interventions help to mediate between tradition and change</i>	70%	30%	0%
<i>Designers function as a “bridge” between artisans and contemporary markets</i>	60%	10%	30%

	Short time intrusions in the lives of artisans	Interactions with a long lasting impact	Can be both. Depends on approach
<i>Design interventions in craft are...</i>	20%	30%	50%

	An expression of the artisan’s creativity	An expression of the designer’s creativity	An equal expression of both	Depends on the approach
<i>The result of a collaboration between artisans and designers is...</i>	10%	10%	50%	30%

Table 5. Summary of results from designer’s survey

the circumstances and context (50%). No participant was explicitly against collaborations.

In responses concerning the role of design in craft, 70% of participants agree with the proposition that *"design can help to mediate between tradition and change"*. These respondents think it is possible to mix tradition and innovation, and that designers can help artisans to adapt to contemporary markets and to preserve traditions. The rest of the participants (30%) considered that the argument is irrelevant since craft evolves and artisans adapt, regardless of any external intervention.

Moreover, 60% of participants agreed that design could be used to *"bridge"* artisanal production and contemporary or international markets, these responses evidence agreement with the approaches found in the development literature (see Artesanías de Colombia et al., 2005). The reasons cited included that *"designers are directly exposed to contemporary consumers"*, and the possibility to add value by *"adapting the product development methodology to the craft context"*. An additional group of participants (30%) considered that the focus on commercialisation depends on the needs of artisans in the context. Participants who disagreed (10%) viewed the production of craft for *"elite markets"* as an imposition over artisans.

Overall, the results suggest that the majority of survey-takers (60%) consider that design adds value to craft practices by targeting new markets and improving commercialisation and economic development as a consequence. However, an additional group of respondents (30%) emphasised exchange and collaboration as the main focus and valuable aspect of interactions. Regarding the positive impact of collaborations for individual artisans and communities, the majority of participants (50%) thinks that positive results depend on the designer's ability to be empathic and collaborate with the community. In relation to projects that result in the design of new craft objects, majority of participants (50%) see the outcome as an equal expression of the creative input of artisans and designers. However, respondents also pointed out that designers usually receive more exposure and recognition. The next section focuses on reporting the themes identified in in-depth interviews with design practitioners and researchers.

The importance of trust-building and immersion in the context

The majority of interviewees and survey participants agreed that interacting with artisans requires socialisation and trust-building to legitimise presence and participation in a craft community. Designers advocate for the need to understand the circumstances and particularities of the local context. The majority of participants agreed on the importance of a diagnosis of specific challenges with local artisans, which will lead to consensual agreement on how to move forward. As one interviewee puts it:

"If [the collaboration] was just an idea by the designer, he/she has first to legitimise his/her presence there. The first thing to do should be a diagnosis of how the locals live, of what craft means for that group, why they make it, for whom they make it, as well as to whom they sell it to. And then the designer can start to look for his/her place in that context. I think you have to analyse each individual case[...] and know what the best choice for that particular context is."

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

According to participants, multiple factors—e.g. social, cultural, technological, environmental and political—surround local craft-making. Implications are not evident at a superficial glance. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the relevance and function of practices for the group, including the role in cultural and economic exchange. Additionally, they mentioned that it is relevant to avoid generalisations about craft communities.

"Some communities might be more urban, even those that are in the middle of the jungle are not completely rural. There is public lighting and electricity, things that are closer to urban life."

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

The need to understand the local culture, meanings and implications, as well as the history behind traditional production methods, materials, techniques, and symbols was shared among all participants. It is worth noting that criticism of interactions with designers made by public officials and artisans focused on lack of knowledge of the same factors leading to decontextualised interventions. Understanding the context, according to participants, requires long-term trust-building, transparency, democratic and inclusive participation, as well as a constant exchange with and between local stakeholders. Although the trend for crafts in Mexico has been to focus on commercialisation, designers interviewed pointed out the significance and social function of craft-making beyond an economic practice.

"The process of making also has a different value for them [...] Among the women in [the community] we have heard things like [an artisan] telling me that every time she weaves a hammock, in the act of weaving she lets go of all of her sadness."

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

Beyond economic development and aid discourse in interactions with artisans

Opinions differed as to whether focusing on economic development by catering to urban markets is a positive approach. However, there was agreement that the idea of modifying vernacular designs from outside the community to fit international markets is ethically conflicting. Several participants expressed concern that the imposition of perspectives outside the local frame of reference transforms local expressions. Participants like *Designer C* mentioned the importance of acknowledging and respecting the design and creative abilities of craft-makers.

"We need to acknowledge that artisans already design! [...] There is a lot of western perceptions about 'good taste' that we learn in design schools [...] But we don't acknowledge that other expressions are beautiful in their own right. We are putting a filter to judge what is 'good' or 'bad' taste, and sadly we want to design everything with that perspective."

(Designer C, January 16, 2019)

Interviewees disagreed with the idea that designers can be a bridge to contemporary markets. Participants considered that this approach entails an asymmetrical power structure, and advocated for reorienting design practices away from the aid discourse. A common view among participants was that interactions are often mutually beneficial and enriching, as designers also learn from artisans and their practices.

"Designers could function as a bridge, but that is an asymmetrical power structure. The designer is not the only bridge; the artisan is also a bridge. Because the bridge is not only from traditional to contemporary but also the other way around."

(Designer B, December 20, 2018)

In this regard, collaborative and especially co-creative and participatory design methods were seen as relevant tools to engage with artisans. As discussed before, building trust, transparency and inclusive participation were considered critical elements for interactions that reach objectives that are valuable for the community.

"My first intention was for the community to welcome us [...] there was the possibility that after that initial process something would emerge for the benefit of the community, but we couldn't be sure at that point. Everything depended on the community giving us permission to continue [...] Every time we go back again, we have a presentation at the end, in front of all of them, where we show our progress and ask for their opinion and if they don't agree with something we stop and change it."

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

Alternative interactions between artisans and designers

Equality and horizontal relationships were recurring themes in all the interviews. Pursuing more inclusive interactions and integrating different perspectives was seen as essential for the majority of practitioners and researchers interviewed. Collaboration across disciplines was seen as a potential opportunity to face the current challenges of the craft sector. In one case, a participant mentioned the need for *transversal*¹⁷ interactions or the inclusion of perspectives from different knowledge domains, disciplines and social points of view.

“When you are collaborating you can make it in a transversal way instead of only being vertical. And by transversality, I mean not only between different disciplines but among different attitudes, different ways to see the world, and different ways of organising it.”

(Designer B, December 20, 2018)

When discussing alternative approaches, the possibility to learn together with the community directly by making, or the need to have a more hands-on approach was brought up by several participants. According to interviewees, designers can assume the role of co-creators and partners, by immersing deeper in the community and its practices.

“In order to understand the process and socialise with the artisans, you have to make. In order to find your place among them, you have to be involved in what they make and not just tell them what to do, but also do it yourself.”

(Designer B, December 20, 2018)

An additional theme was the possibility to face the current challenges of the craft sector through collaboration. Similar issues were identified by designers and in conversations with artisans of Michoacan; common challenges included:

- Overexploitation of local materials
- Environmental impact of increased craft production
- Autonomy and self-reliance of the sector
- Support to local social causes and knowledge exchange between artisans

According to respondents, these challenges can be faced through multidisciplinary collaboration with relevant professionals, while prioritising participation and decision making by local artisans. *Designers A and B* (personal communication, 2019) expressed optimism about the alignment of stakeholders to face these challenges and cited examples of how they have used this strategy in practice.

¹⁷ The concept of transversality—transversalidad—is used mostly in Latin America in the public management and educational contexts. Definitions are ambiguous, but overall it refers to the articulation of social and environmental issues across different organisations and knowledge domains (Serra, 2005).

"Taking advantage of the power structures that the project was linked to, like [institutions] with public funding and clear objectives[...] we put together a group of people: a social psychologist, an anthropologist, an ethnobotany expert and many other people who could tackle the issue from different angles. From the perspectives of different disciplines."

(Designer B, December 20, 2018)

Finally, participants pointed out that direct collaboration in the design of new craft objects is the most prevalent form of interaction. However, interviewees mentioned the potential to co-design solutions with craft communities at the service and system levels. According to them, this approach requires participatory engagement with grassroots initiatives.

"It is very easy to understand that designers and artisans collaborate to make clay objects, but how often do we see them collaborating to design systems or services? If it's true that designers have the abilities of creative and lateral thinking and problem-solving, then the artisan is also capable of that, because our training is based on similar creative practices."

(Designer B, December 20, 2018)

"The craft itself, on the level of the piece, is not intervened, but instead we help with the system, or help them to organise in certain ways so that what is already being made can help them to get access to the services they lack and that they know they need."

(Designer A, December 13, 2018)

INTERNAL	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialisation and hands-on practice used to collaboratively identify issues. • Exchange of knowledge and collaboration as driver of interactions. • Possibility to co-design service and system level solutions with community. 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aid discourse and top-down initiatives • Lack of knowledge of symbolic, historical and material implications of local practices
	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and diagnosing specific challenges with local artisans. • Defining goals with the community. • Inclusive, transparent and democratic participation and decision making. • Collaboration across disciplines to face the current challenges of the craft sector. 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public institutions and some artisans in Michoacan are wary of interactions with external collaborators. • Building trust with locals and understanding the context is a long-term process.
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

Figure 22. SWOT analysis of artisans in communities of Michoacan

Summary of findings from designers collaborating with artisans in Mexico

Figure 22 presents the most relevant findings from the survey and interviews with designers in a SWOT matrix. More than half of the designers surveyed agreed with the approaches proposed in the development literature, or considered that they are useful in some cases and contexts. However, extended responses and in-depth interviews show that participants also value other aspects of interactions, such as exchange of knowledge and collaboration which also drive some interactions with artisans. Furthermore, it was identified that acquiring knowledge about the local context requires socialisation and hands-on involvement in craft-making. According to participants, an additional advantage of learning-by-doing is that issues can be identified and articulated over practice.

Weak points of current engagements included the use of a discourse of aid towards artisans and the imposition of ideas defined without the craft-makers involvement. In agreement with the findings from artisans and public institutions—see *Figure 13* and *Figure 21*—, designers recognise that lack of knowledge of the value of local practices can lead to decontextualised interactions. Another recurrent theme was the need for inclusivity, transparency and democratic participation. Suggestions for alternative strategies mentioned by designers interviewed included:

- Identification and diagnosis of relevant challenges with local artisans
- Definition of goals with the community
- Collaboration across disciplines—including relevant professionals and stakeholders—to face the current challenges of the sector

Additionally, a few interviewees highlighted the possibility of design involvement that goes beyond intervention in craft objects and aims at co-designing services and systems by engaging at the grassroots level. Finally, negative past experiences with design students in Michoacan have led to skepticism from public institutions and locals. This is a barrier for building trust with artisans and other stakeholders involved, a process that, according to participants, is achievable only through continued and long-term interaction.



Figure 23. Statue of a Clay Catrina figure at the entrance of the town of Capula, Michoacan.

4.2 The case of Capula and the Clay Catrina

In addition to the findings from participants of each stakeholder group, the town of Capula provided a relevant case to analyse the interaction between local artisans and external collaborators. Craft production in Capula—some 20 kilometres from Morelia, the state's capital—has historically focused on utilitarian pottery (Sosa Ruiz, 2014). However, production has shifted to new objects aimed at tourists and collectors. The change is attributed to the interaction with a plastic artist that moved to the town in the 1980s'. In the last 10 years, local artisans producing the new craft object have designed strategies to attract tourists and craft consumers, with the support of local and state governments. Tourists are attracted to Capula through a *Day of the Dead* fair organised yearly. The main objective of the fair is to commercialise the recently created craft object: the *Clay Catrina*—see Figure 23.

Considering the low insertion of design in Michoacan, the case allowed to understand the implications of long-term collaborations with external creatives. Through this case, it was also possible to look at the role and perspectives of different stakeholders—including individual artisans and their associations, external collaborators, and public institutions.

Brief historical background of the Catrina image

The Calavera Catrina (Posada, ca. 1910)—Dapper Skeleton or Elegant Skull—is a famous depiction of a skeleton wearing early 20th-century clothes. According to



Figure 24. Representations of death imagery and the Catrina through time

1 Mictlantecuhltli; aztec God of the Dead, found in Teotihuacan; shown at the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City. Photography by Anagoria (January, 2014) CC BY 3.0

2 Calavera Catrina, engraving by Posada (ca. 1910)

3 Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park, Rivera (1947)

4 Clay Catrina made by artisan Alejandro Jacobo Pineda from Capula (2019)

Brandes (1998) and Ruiz Gomez (2019), the image originated in the engravings of Mexican lithographer and cartoonist José Guadalupe Posada. The original zinc etching was titled "*La Calavera Garbancera*", and it portrayed the skull wearing only a feathered hat (see Figure 24). The illustration mocked the aspirations of Mexican middle class at the turn of the century and beginning of the Mexican revolution—a period of social and political unrest in the country. Mexico's post-revolution modern art movement further popularised Posada's work, particularly the Catrina image¹⁸.

Although the use of skulls and death imagery predates Mexico's colonial period, the link between pre-hispanic traditions and contemporary *Day of the Dead* imagery is disputed (see: Brandes, 1998; Malvido, 2006 & Reyes García, 2013). However, scholars agree that the popularity of the image has consolidated it as an icon of the Day of the Dead celebrations. Analysis of Mexican pre-hispanic imagery by Brandes indicates that skull imagery has "*influenced Mexican street and gallery art profoundly*" (1998, p.213). While also recognising that most contemporary representations have little historical connection to local craft traditions, and are usually intended for touristic consumption.

The creation of the Clay Catrina and the Catrina Fair

In the early 1980s' a well-known plastic artist from Michoacan's capital moved into the town of Capula. According to *Artist A*, at the time he was inspired by Rivera and Posada's imagery and used skulls as the central theme of his artwork. He chronicles the following about the origins of the Clay Catrina:

"I started doing this even before I came to Capula[...] I was living in Morelia, and I had 2 or 3 exhibitions[...] with skulls, only skulls of different kinds. When I came here [Capula], I was still doing the same work and personal exhibitions. They [the artisans] started to join; and, in the end, the Catrina character was the only one that remained[...] it was all inspired by the work of Posada, all those peasants that he will show as skulls."

(Artist A, February 13, 201).

After settling in the town, the artist learned about traditional clay work from locals. This experience motivated him to create a general design and moulds that he later shared with a few artisans—plaster moulds were not common at the time in Capula. Artisans sold the first craft objects made using these moulds in a *Day of the Dead* market in the town of Patzcuaro. The sculptural objects were successful among international tourists, motivating more artisans to learn the new technique.

¹⁸ Famous muralist Diego Rivera used the skull in his 1947 painting "*Dream of a Sunday afternoon along the Central Alameda*" (Rivera, 1947). Rivera allegedly gave the character its popular name of "*La Catrina*", and depicted it fully clothed (Brandes, 1998), as it is represented in Capula's clay work.



Figure 25. Traditional pottery drying under the sun at an artisan's workshop.

"He [the first artisan who sold them] was surprised because back in those days a lot of American tourists would come [to Patzcuaro], and all of them wanted to buy the Catrinas. The Mexican tourists would[...] ask him 'why do you do that? Are you doing witchcraft or something?' But the Americans would buy them super fast. And he made more for the next year, and the same thing happened."

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

The *Day of the Dead* celebration in Michoacan is a popular event that attracts many national and international visitors¹⁹, especially to the town of Patzcuaro—where commercialisation of the Catrina started. Years after the initial success and widespread adoption of the technique in the community, an association named the *Catrina Fair Trust* was created. The group organises a yearly fair in Capula, with support from local and state governments. The festival aims to attract tourists interested in the celebration, *Clay Catrinas* have centre stage and can be purchased at the event. The annual fair has been successful in attracting visitors and giving visibility to Capula since its first edition in 2011. The favourable reception of the new craft object led to a shift in the production by local artisans. With many turning from pottery makers (Figure 25) into Clay Catrina makers—or "*Catrineros*" (Figure 26).

Additional strategies by the *Catrina Fair Trust* include the trademarking of the new craft object. According to locals, the *Mexican Institute of Industrial Property* (IMPI) awarded a "denomination of origin" registry upon request from the craft association. Overall, artisans in Capula have registered three distinct collective brands over the years: *Traditional Pottery*²⁰, *Dotwork Pottery*²¹, and the recently created *Clay Catrinas*²². The collective brands are managed by members of the *Catrina Fair Trust and Capula's Artisans Union*. The collective brands allow artisans to share intellectual property rights among members of the community.

Figure 27 illustrates the artisan unions and collaborators active in the town, as well as the strategies for craft production and distribution. The diagram shows the different approaches of *Traditional Pottery* artisans and *Clay Catrina* makers. The

¹⁹ The *Day of the Dead* celebrations are part of UNESCO's list of Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2008).

²⁰ The origins of Traditional Pottery—also called "*Capulineado*"—can be traced back to the 1940s'. Locals claim that pottery was instituted by Vasco de Quiroga in his division of crafts of Michoacan, ca. 1550, however, Victoria Novelo mentions that it was wood instead of pottery that was assigned to Capula (as cited in Soza Ruiz, 2014, p. 3). Regardless of this dispute, archeological findings indicate that clay work was produced in the area during the prehispanic period (Dietz, 1995).

²¹ Established ca. 1960 (Soza Ruis, 2014; Dietz, 1995).

²² Established in the early 1980s' (Artist A & Artisan C, personal communication, 2019).

creation and acceptance of the new craft object has increased sales revenue and local self-employment opportunities. Simultaneously, the festival has given artisans direct access to consumers and national visibility. In the words of a local artisan and member of the *Catrina Fair Trust* association:

“The Catrina Fair has kickstarted activities in Capula. Capula used to be very poor, and we struggled a lot to make a living day by day, but the Catrina Fair has made Capula very visible thanks to the promotion and diffusion given to the event. The Catrina[...] brought a lot of development to the town. Since anyone who learns how to make them has a lot of work thanks to the fair. People make a good living, and that helps.”

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

Artisan C also pointed out that as a consequence of the revitalisation of craft as an economic activity in the town, younger generations have shown interest in learning the technique as a side activity from school. The artisan pointed out that he did not have access to college education in his youth. He instead worked full-time as a traditional pottery maker, following the steps of his father, only becoming a *Catrina* maker later in his life. He considers that it is a positive thing that future generations can work in craft and study at the same time.



Figure 26. A Catrina maker showing his work

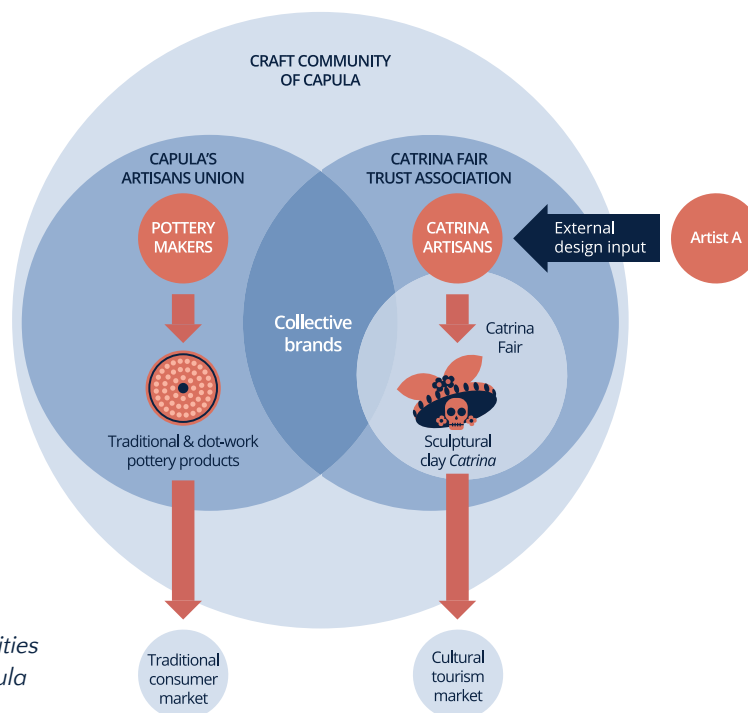


Figure 27. Craft communities and associations of Capula

“Kids nowadays don’t look for a part-time job anymore; they start making crafts and use it to support their studies. And we are noticing that many of the kids start to become entrepreneurs also. They study and work, and at the same time, they buy Catrinas from their cousins to paint them and sell them on Sundays.”

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)



Figure 28. Traditional pottery maker workshop

Locals also attribute the reduction in migration to the U.S. to the increase in craft sales in Capula. Artisans mentioned that previously, many locals would migrate temporarily in search of jobs²³.

“Migration has gone down a lot! [...] I know people who will go to the U.S. and come back several times over the years. But now they just stay here to make Catrinas. They haven’t gone back to the United States. Because there are jobs and they can live well, and they are with their families.”

(Artisan D, January 31, 2019)

The main benefit of linking craft sales with local festivities has been the attraction of tourists to the town, putting artisans in direct contact with consumers. Direct connection to purchasers has helped Capula artisans to bypass intermediaries and resellers. Catrina makers interviewed were aware of the link between craft and tourism in the town. However, they embraced the change as positive and considered that conditions were more challenging when they had to rely on intermediaries and sell their work at lower prices.

“We rely on tourism, but the tourism that we need is ‘cultural tourism’ [...] people who like ‘popular art’ and who want to have artisanal pieces in their homes. We have had the fair for some 9 or 10 years now. Before that, we used to make crafts at home and then sell it to someone who bought it right here in the town, a reseller as they are known. That’s the way that we worked in Capula for several decades.”

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

Inequalities in Capula’s craft ecosystem

Although the majority of participants approached in Capula had a positive view of the interaction with Artist A and the *Catrina Fair Trust*, changes have also raised conflicts within the community. A few artisans mentioned inequalities between *Clay Catrina* artisans and *Traditional Pottery* makers. Community members like *Artisan D*, a traditional pottery artisan who runs a workshop next to his home with the help of his young daughter, still make pots and plates using traditional

²³ This claim is backed by declarations made by the Secretary of Tourism in April of this year, who claim a 60% reduction of migration in the town (Celaya, 2019a).

tools and techniques. *Artisan D* mentioned that he works 12-hour shifts every day to be able to make a living. He does not know sculptural clay techniques or plaster moulds and would like to receive training to improve his income.

"I have never used a mould or a throwing wheel. I have seen other people use them, and I would like to learn because by making only traditional pottery, you don't make as much money."

(Artisan D, January 31, 2019)

"Each of us works with different techniques. I, for example, only work with the traditional [pottery making] technique."

(Artisan E, February 1, 2019)

Declining sales of traditional pottery and unfamiliarity with the more recent craft techniques make it difficult for pottery artisans to avoid dealing with intermediaries and resellers. This situation puts them at a disadvantage compared to *Catrina* makers.

"Dealing with resellers is a necessity for me. I can sell more plates with them, but they will always bargain prices. It is very hard to make a living like this."

(Artisan D, January 31, 2019)

As evidenced by the testimonies of *Traditional Pottery* and *Catrina* makers, innovation in craft products and market strategies has been beneficial for artisans that can receive training. At the same time, the change has created an income gap with *Traditional Pottery* makers. It's important also to point out that not everyone in the community has a positive opinion of the association with creatives like *Artist A*. On this topic, *Artisan C* pointed out:

"One time a person asked me: 'Don't you think that [Artist A] is taking advantage of you?' Because[...] we advertise the Catrina Fair using his paintings"

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

Despite this criticism, craft makers like *Artisan C* firmly believe that the relationship is beneficial for both parties. As it allows Capula's artisans to make use of the reputation and network of *Artist A*. Moreover, he considers the artist a member of the community, which gives legitimacy to his contributions.

"People would ask us: 'Why don't you use a photo of a clay Catrina?'. He [Artist A] is taking advantage of you by showing his paintings!". But I tell them: 'look, it's deeper than that'. [Artist A] has already reached international recognition. A lot of people already know him. So, he uses us but we use him too. When we use one of his paintings we are showing what we have in Capula. We are not asking for a painter from somewhere else, but a painter from the town! He has been living here since the '80s."

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

Findings from the Capula case

The revitalisation of artisanal activities in Capula through collaboration with *Artist A* aligns with some features of development initiatives, considering that the main objective of the interaction has been to improve the economic conditions of local artisans. However, the collaboration started organically without any development plan or formal backing by public institutions. Local and state governments provided support to the initiative only after the continued success of the *Clay Catrina* and its acceptance by artisans in the community, including the creation of the *Catrina Fair Trust*.

It is, nevertheless, difficult to classify this interaction as either a full development initiative or grassroots innovation. Since it relies on both expert and local knowledge to improve the artisans economy while encouraging them to define their relationship with the market internally. Local artisans indicate that the new object has allowed them to continue practising craft-making as their primary source of livelihood. Moreover, it has encouraged other pottery makers to become “*Catrineros*”, and new generations of Capula’s artisans are already learning the new technique from their parents, evidencing its consolidation and acceptance by the community. The success of the *Clay Catrinas* of Capula is attributed by members of the community to two factors.

1. The long-term interaction between Artist A and the community, resulting in the creation of the *Clay Catrina*, using local knowledge (traditional clay work) and external expertise.
2. The creation by the community of associations like the *Catrina Fair Trust*, which allowed artisans to design a service to attract tourists and consumers—the yearly *Catrina Fair*,— with backing from *Artist A* as well as local and state governments. This innovation has given artisans direct access to consumers and national visibility, bypassing one of the main issues identified in other towns of Michoacan—the need to use intermediaries to reach consumers.

Overall, the Capula case illustrates how interaction with external stakeholders can be used to face challenges in local craft-making. The collaboration has required long-term interaction with the grassroots level, with Artist A fully immersing in Capula’s community. Moreover, the interaction is an iterative process, as new issues arise additional strategies are discussed. To exemplify this, it is relevant to mention that both Catrina makers and the artist express concerns over market saturation.

“On the one hand I am very glad, because [the Catrina makers] are doing really well with sales. They have improved so much! But I warn them that at this rate they are going to saturate the market, they take some 200 to 300 Catrina orders each month, it’s too much!”

(Artist A, February 13, 2019)

In response to this, artisans in Capula continue engaging with Artist A to develop and implement plans for diversifying their offer of clay objects. Currently, they expect to expand into religious imagery linked to other local festivities like the catholic holy week²⁴.

“We want to give more options to the people because they’ll get bored with only Catrinas. So, that is why we are starting with the clay crosses. We want to see what happens and how well it works during the holy week.”

(Artisan C, January 31, 2019)

²⁴ After concluding the fieldwork, news articles (Celaya, 2019b; Lara, 2019) surfaced mentioning the implementation of this plan. With an official event and support from the municipal government of Capula.

5. Findings

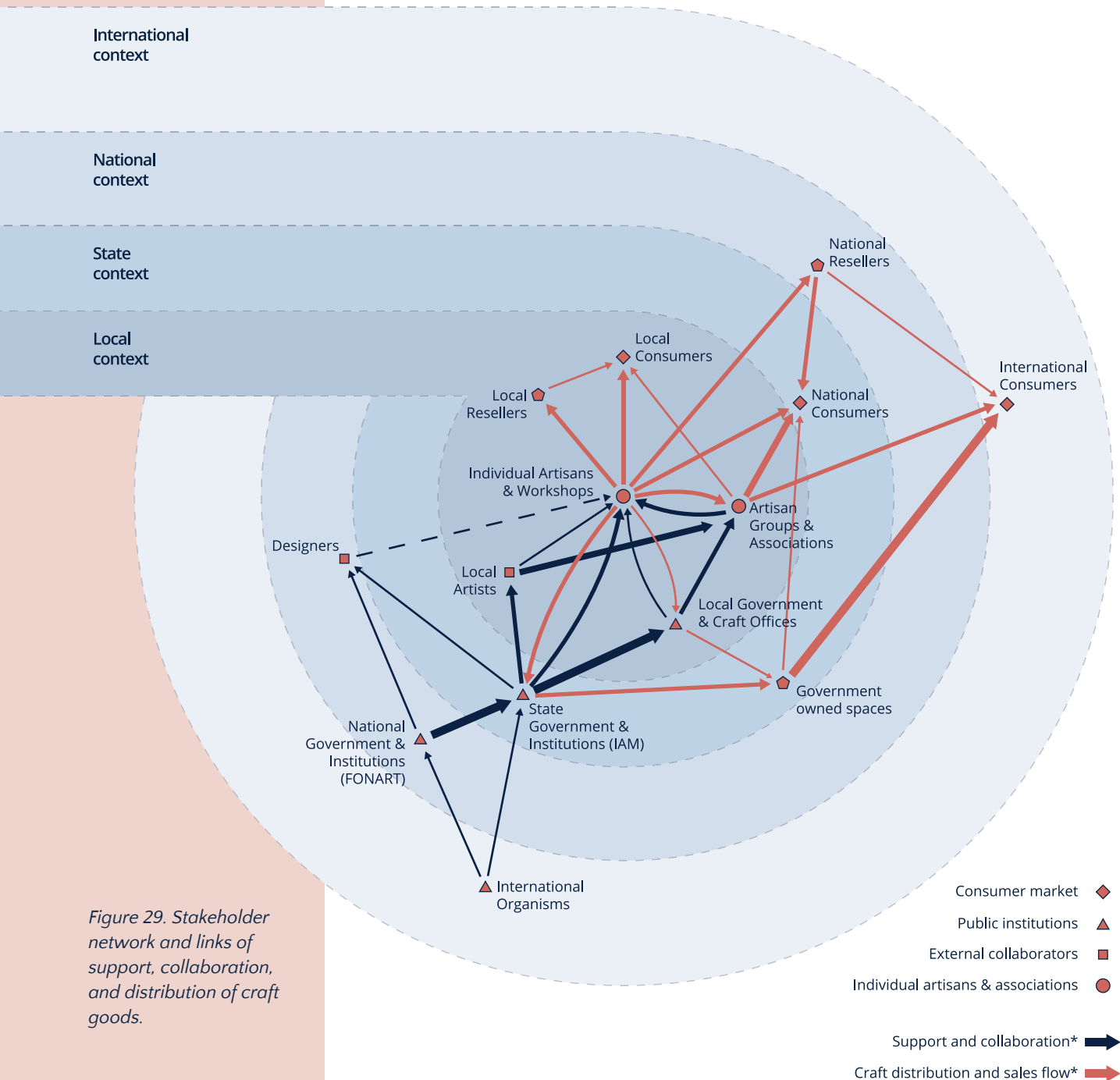


Figure 29. Stakeholder network and links of support, collaboration, and distribution of craft goods.

5.1 Mechanisms, practices, and challenges in the craft ecosystem of Michoacan

This project set out to explore (*How can designers and other stakeholders in craft ecosystems of Mexico interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?*) For this purpose, the study spanned observation, interviews and discussion with members of each relevant stakeholder group, as well as analysis of a long-term collaboration between a local artist and members of a traditional craft community. To answer the main research question, it was considered necessary to explore the existing mechanisms, practices, and challenges in the craft ecosystem. The following paragraphs summarise the overall findings of the research in these three areas.

5.1.1 Mechanisms in the craft ecosystem

Figure 29 illustrates the network of *support, collaboration, and distribution* of craft goods that links all stakeholders in the ecosystem. As identified by previous studies (Canclini, 1993; Dietz, 1995; FONART, 2015; Novelo, 2012 & Sosa Ruiz, 2014), current mechanisms prioritise the commercialisation of craft for national and international tourists and consumers, backed by a public policy that relies on *cultural tourism*. Stakeholders from each group have different roles in these mechanisms.

Support

Provided primarily by public institutions and indirectly by international organisms. However, public organisations in the state have limited internal capabilities due to budget restrictions and continually shifting institutional priorities. Grassroots initiatives in the form of artisan associations and groups also support individual craft-makers through collective brands and organisation of events for sales of craft objects. Local associations provide more reliable and predictable support to individual artisans, thanks to the direct knowledge and understanding of their challenges.

Collaboration

Mainly with local artists—as in the case of Capula—who directly engage in long-term interactions with individual artisans and grassroots organisations to design new craft objects. Design professionals from outside the state also interact irregularly with local craft makers in Michoacan; however, institutions and artisans are wary of short-term encounters, which are perceived as unsuccessful in bringing substantial benefits to the sector.

Distribution and commercialisation

Through resellers and intermediaries, craft associations, and state and local public institutions. The flow of craft goods is the primary source of unrest in the craft ecosystem. Individual artisans have limited access to spaces and therefore to national and international tourists and consumers.

5.1.2 Practices in the craft ecosystem

The focus on commercialisation is encouraged by two factors, (1) the scarcity of job opportunities, and (2) public policy that sees tourists and international markets as the most viable alternatives for improving the local economy. The most notable practices observed in the craft ecosystem include:

Craft-making as a tool for self-employment

According to artisans interviewed in Michoacan, selling craft objects allows them to have a steady source of income in communities with few job opportunities. However, the focus on tourism and the limited access to sale spaces forces artisans who can not access them to rely on intermediaries or sell informally on the streets. This points at ineffective support from state and local institutions.

Adaptations to craft practices by local artisans and through collaboration with external creatives

Field observation and interviews indicate that several artisans adapt their practices to meet market demands. Recent changes to craft products by local artisans were pointed out by participants and further evidenced by the case of the town of Capula. Changes in Capula's craft initiated through organic collaboration with a local artist. As a consequence of this collaboration, local associations and collective brands were created, further evidencing grassroots adaptations to gain direct access to consumers.

Collective and mixed-use of spaces by indigenous communities

Indigenous groups struggle to legitimise the use of a building shared by several artisans. The occupation of the space is a reaction to the inability of public institutions to guarantee access to sale spaces. The building is used for diverse activities: as a sales venue, school, and centre for social events. This mixed-used points at the possibility of using other existing spaces for functions that allow cultural and social exchange between artisans.

5.1.3 Challenges in the craft ecosystem

The challenges identified in the craft ecosystem of the *Lacustre* and *Centre* regions of Michoacan are related to commercialisation, increase in local production, and the interaction with institutions and stakeholders providing support or collaborating with artisans. The four main challenges found by the study are:

Unequal access to sale spaces and consumers

Connected to the existing mechanisms, the distribution network of craft goods

is managed primarily by intermediaries, including public institutions at the state and local levels. Confirming findings from previous studies (Canclini, 1993; Dietz, 1995 & Felipe Ochoa y Asociados, n.d.), fieldwork indicates that artisans who can not access these spaces have to rely on resellers or sell informally on the streets. Artisans indicate distrust and friction with public institutions due to this issue, especially for indigenous communities that struggle to maintain ownership of buildings.

Overexploitation of local raw materials

Generated by increased production in some communities. Concerns about raw materials were expressed by participants from all stakeholder groups, mentioned as a critical issue faced by artisans in several communities. There was agreement among interviewees on the need for linking with external collaborators, experts, and institutions to research alternatives for sustainable use of local resources. However, local and state organisms currently do not prioritise these topics.

Limited institutional support for training and knowledge exchange between artisans

Public officials and craft-makers agree that supporting interaction between artisans through training, competitions, and similar activities is a valuable task for improving craft skills and encouraging local innovation. Although artisans see these programs as highly valuable, current efforts prioritise commercialisation due to limited budget and shifting institutional priorities.

Distrust of institutions and external collaborators

Several artisans approached on the field consider that past efforts of short-term collaboration with artists and designers have failed to have a positive impact for the local artisans. Since the brief involvement of design students and professional artists from outside the communities increases the probability of decontextualised perspectives. Additionally, the majority of artisans expressed distrust of public institutions, given the constant shifts in their programs, and the difficult access to spaces for the commercialisation of craft objects.

6. Conclusions

Previous studies have identified continued transformations in craft practices in Michoacan due to the influence of globalisation and modernity (Canclini, 1993, Sosa Ruiz, 2014). In addition, studies focusing on interactions with artisans backed by development initiatives are critical of the role that industrial designers play in these changes (DeNicola & DeNicola, 2012). The results of this study confirm the continued progression of craft practices into an activity aimed for commercialisation. However, in the specific case of Michoacan, field research indicates that design has a low insertion in the state, and therefore limited involvement in economic development initiatives and current changes in craft practices.

Transformations have responded mainly to a public policy that relies on improving economic conditions through cultural tourism. Changes and adaptations to craft practices have also been initiated by artisans to improve their income. In parallel, interactions with other external collaborators like local artists, have managed to create new craft objects that have been accepted by the community. According to local artisans, craft plays a vital role as a source of self-employment in rural and semi-urban communities with few jobs available.

Changes in craft practices cause concerns of loss of local identity, according to public officials and some community members. However, local artisans in Capula, indicate that the new craft object resulting from the collaboration with a local artist has allowed them to continue practising craft-making as their primary source of livelihood. Finally, through the qualitative inquiry of the craft ecosystem of the *Lacustre* and *Centre* regions of Michoacan, it was possible to identify three existing mechanisms of interaction between stakeholders: (1) support, (2) collaboration and (3) distribution and commercialisation.

6.1 Alternative interactions that support local knowledge and culture

After identifying the existing mechanisms, practices and challenges, the aim of this study was to examine (*how could stakeholders interact with artisans to better support local knowledge and culture?*). Based on the analysis of the data collected, the study identified five implications for interactions that can potentially support local knowledge and culture in the ecosystem:

1. Engagement and participation from the grassroots level
2. Collaborative identification of issues and definition of goals with the artisan or community
3. Increased support to grassroots initiatives
4. Interactions that address issues at the service and system levels
5. Continuous trust-building in the interactions

Engagement and participation from the grassroots level

The mechanisms of support for the craft sector are currently disconnected from local knowledge and issues, pointing at the need for external collaborators to address challenges by participating at the grassroots level. Although institutions are meant to support artisans to meet goals that the community finds valuable, initiatives and policies are designed without the active participation of local craft-

makers. Considering that artisans are “practitioners of their own knowledge” (Escobar, 2018, p.184), they are the main stakeholders and decision-makers in any issue that concerns said practices. The role of collaborators—including designers—and institutions in the ecosystem can be to support local initiatives and create better conditions for participatory engagements with artisans.

Collaborative identification of issues and definition of goals with the artisan or community

As identified in previous long-term studies (Garduno García, 2017), participatory design can potentially be used as a methodology for supporting the inquiry of local issues by members of the community. Although several participants identify evident challenges like the overexploitation of local raw materials, the issue is currently not addressed by public institutions or at the grassroots level. A majority of artisans agree on the benefits of involving external collaborators and institutions to face these issues. Regarding local materials, one participant mentioned: *“To face this situation, studies related to craft production should be constant, to keep things up to date and have a constant diagnostic.”* (Artisan F, February 22, 2019). Once issues are identified, transparent, democratic and inclusive participation is also needed to define goals for support and collaboration.

Increased support to grassroots initiatives

Participants mentioned that training and exchange between craft-makers is one of the most valuable strategies offered by public institutions. However these initiatives do not receive as much support as commercialisation. Goals of these encounters can be set, for example, to support innovation by local artisans. On this topic, a craft maker pointed out: *“it could be useful to create a branch of competitions that considers innovation as the central thing to be evaluated by a jury that has worked in the community”* (Artisan B, January 24, 2019). Grassroots initiatives in towns like Capula have also addressed challenges such as access to consumers by designing new strategies. However, the organisation of events that put artisans in direct contact with consumers has required support from external collaborators—a local artist—and public institutions.

Interactions that address issues at the service and system levels

The majority of the development literature centre on the role of designers engaging with the craft sector by focusing on direct interventions in the design of craft objects. However, challenges such as the overuse of local raw materials could potentially be addressed through the co-design of solutions that tackle the service and system levels of craft-making. Commenting on this type of engagements, Designer A said the following: *“The craft itself, on the level of the piece, is not intervened, but instead we help with the system[...] so that what is already being made can help them to get access to the services they lack”* (December 13, 2018). One possible factor limiting this type of interactions is the need for long-term studies and multidisciplinary approaches to approach issues related to sustainability, which in turn requires funding and trust-building with the community.

Continuous trust-building in the interactions

The study identified that distrust from artisans towards the public sector is connected to the unpredictable focus in institutional objectives. Although current commercialisation strategies provide spaces to sell craft objects, these benefits do not extend to the majority of artisans. Furthermore, even for beneficiaries, the government assumes the role of an intermediary to international markets, damaging trust in the process. A shift towards addressing the main challenges of the sector, including the sustainability of commercialisation approaches, and the need for additional support to training and exchange programs, could improve the relationship with artisans and help to strengthen trust as an outcome. This shift, however, requires institutions to have clear objectives that are not determined in isolation, but through direct engagement with artisans to identify issues that are relevant for each community.

Distrust is also a barrier in short-term interactions with external collaborators, including designers. It was identified during the study, that the duration of engagements could limit the understanding of techniques, history, meanings, and value of traditional craft practices. As exemplified in the Case of Capula, long-term interaction allows for a constant exchange with the community and to build trust and understand local needs.

Overall, long-term interaction, socialisation, and hands-on practice are essential tools for building trust. Regarding learning-by-doing, an artisan interviewed mentioned: "It's like those artists that go to communities[...], but they don't learn. They don't know the basics or how to do it themselves" (Artisan A, January 24, 2019). Designers also agree on the relevance of hands-on practice to immerse in the local context. On this topic, Designer B mentioned: "In order to understand the process and socialise with the artisans, you have to make. To find your place among them, you have to[...] do it yourself" (December 20, 2018.)

Final reflection

The professional practice of design has focused historically on attending to the material needs of people. In a similar fashion, the traditional making of objects has locally satisfied these needs for centuries in an organic way. Perhaps it is for this reason that designers have been interested in engaging with artisans, looking at the possibility to connect with other forms of thinking about the world and the objects that we use in our everyday lives. However, as the social and environmental impact of our contemporary ways of living and relating to others become increasingly evident, it also becomes necessary to rethink our practices and how we interact with each other.

This project allowed to look at design not only as a method for creating new objects, but as a way of inquiring about the relationship between design itself and other material practices. The main challenges identified during the research, point at the need for designers and institutions to reevaluate how they engage with artisans, who are practitioners of a knowledge that emphasises respect to tradition, identity, and territory. The only way to be able to understand these practices is by directly engaging with artisans and empathising with their struggles, needs, and ambitions. This is not only applicable to the collaboration between craft and design, but to any interaction that requires several people to come together and reach a common goal. Finally, the most valuable learning of the project, is that the collaborative skills of designers can be used to support efforts to face challenges beyond economic development. However, this requires long-term commitment and alignment between different stakeholders to explore paths together with the community.



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Appendices

Appendix 1

Structure of in-depth interviews with designers

General information:

- Explain about the topic, research and use of data
- Can you tell me about your previous experience interacting with artisans in Mexico?
- What has been your role?

The role of designers interacting with artisans:

1. Do you think there is a need for designers to collaborate with artisans?
2. In your opinion, what should be the role of the designer in these collaborations?

Drivers of the interactions:

3. Do you think it's possible for interventions to mediate between tradition and change?
4. Is this something desirable? Why?
5. Some proponents of this type of interventions believe that designers can function as a bridge between traditional production and contemporary or foreign markets, or to preserve craft techniques and traditions. Do you agree with any of these? Why?
6. Should the objective be to preserve a craft, or to ensure the economic survival of artisans?

The value of interactions:

7. Do you think design interventions are a short-term intrusion into artisanal life, or does it have a long-lasting impact in the life of artisans?
8. Do you think this process adds value to the artisan's work, economically and in terms of creative inputs?
9. In your opinion, whose creativity is reflected in the final expression, the designer's, the artisan's or both?

About the future of the sector and interactions between artisans and designers:

10. In your opinion what would be a desirable future for the interaction between artisans and designers? Think about 5 to 10 years from now.

Thanks and wrap-up:

- Is there any additional comments you would like to make or any questions?

Appendix 2

Structure of in-depth interviews with public officials

General information:

- Explain about the topic, research and use of data
- Can you tell me a little bit about your institution and your role in it?

General questions about the role of public institutions:

1. What are the activities of the institution?
2. What is the relationship to other institutions in the local, state and national levels?
3. What about international institutions?
4. What are the main objectives?
5. What are the main challenges and strengths of your institution?

Perspective on craft and design interaction:

6. Do you currently have or have had any projects that involve collaboration between artisans and designers
7. What other relationship exists between design(ers) and your institution?
8. What do you think should be the role of designers (if any) in these interactions?

Interaction between institutions and artisans:

9. Usually, what is the dynamic of interaction with artisans and communities?
10. Are there any issues currently faced by the institution in the interaction with artisans?
11. What is the main market for craft sales? Are there any statistics?

General challenges for the sector:

12. In your opinion, what are the main challenges of the local/state craft sector?

Thanks and wrap-up:

- Is there any additional comments you would like to make or any questions?

Appendix 3

Structure of in-depth interviews with artisans

General information:

- Explain about the topic, research and use of data
- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your craft technique?

General questions about craft/community:

1. How long have you been working in this technique?
2. Who did you learn it from?
3. Are other members of your family working in this technique?
4. How do you organize among artisans?

About the role of craft:

5. What is the main reason why you make crafts?
6. (If commercial) Who are your main customers?

About interactions with institutions:

7. Do you receive any support from the government or other institutions?
What kind?
8. Overall, how would you describe the interaction with institutions?

About interactions with designers:

9. Have you ever heard about collaborations between artisans and designers?
10. What do you think about these collaborations? Have you had any personal experience?
11. Overall, how would you describe these interactions?

General challenges for the sector:

12. In your opinion what are the main issues faced by craft and artisans right now?

Thanks and wrap-up:

- Is there any additional comments you would like to make or any questions?

Appendix 4

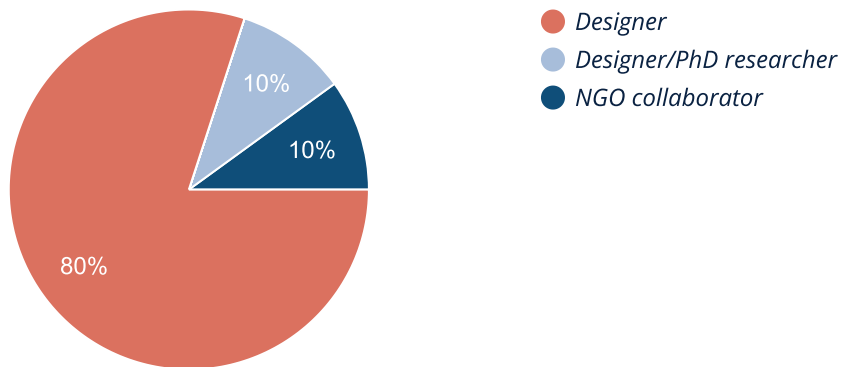
Structure of survey of designers interacting with artisans in Mexico

1. Occupation
2. Do you think there is a need for designers to collaborate with artisans?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Depends on the circumstances
3. What do you think should be the role of designers collaborating with artisans?
4. Do you think this interventions can mediate between tradition and change?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. Why?
6. It is said that design can function as a “bridge” between artisanal production and contemporary and/or foreign markets. Do you agree with this statement?
 - a. Agree
 - b. Disagree
 - c. Depends on the context
7. Why?
8. Do you consider that interactions with designers are a short-time intrusion in the creative life of artisans, or do you think that the impact in their work and creative process is long lasting?
9. Why?
10. In your opinion, in collaborations is the final product a result of the expression and creativity of the artisan? the designer? or both?
11. Why?
12. Would you be interested in being contacted for a follow-up interview?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

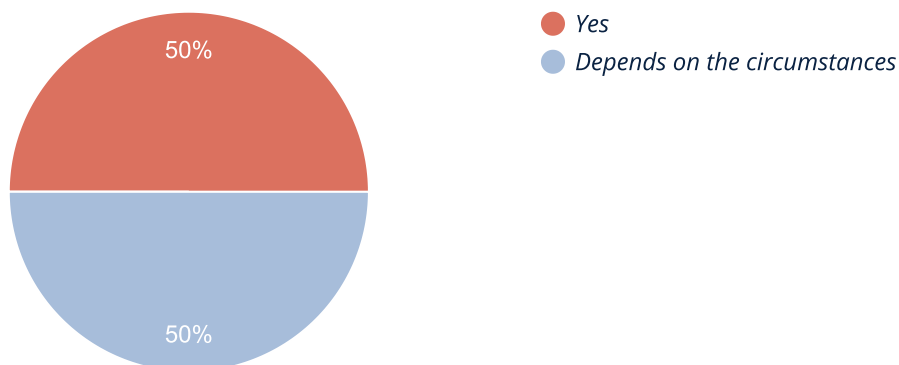
Appendix 5

Summary of results from survey of designers interacting with artisans in Mexico

1. Occupation:



2. Do you think there is a need for designers to collaborate with artisans?



3. What do you think should be the role of designers collaborating with artisans?

Market focused:

- New product development
- Process optimization
- Design & market strategies
- Bridge to new markets
- Added value
- Tool for economic development

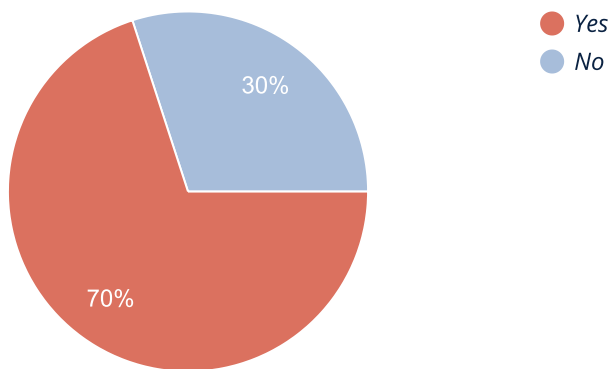
Collaboration focused:

- Co-creation & collaboration
- Open exchange of knowledge
- Apprenticeship
- Facilitators
- Preservation of tradition

Against collaboration:

- Collaborations are abusive/exploitative
- Designers "steal" knowledge from artisans

4. Do you think these interventions can help to mediate between tradition and change?



5. Why?

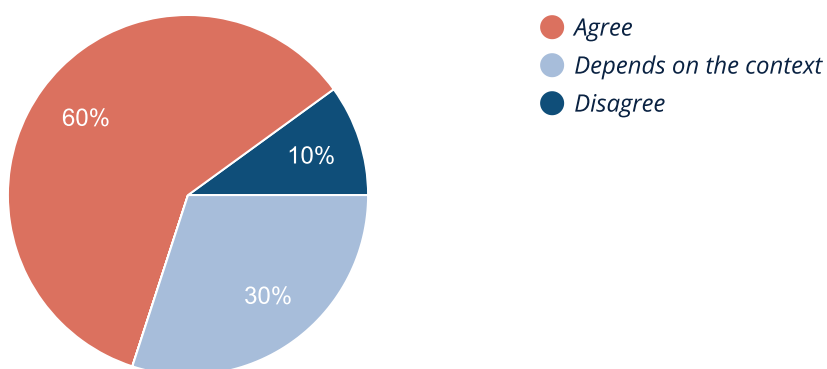
No

- Craft evolves regardless of design intervention (4) / However, design can help in the transition (1)

Yes

- Interventions can mix tradition & innovation (3)
- Interventions help to adapt craft to contemporary markets (3)
- Design can help to preserve tradition

6. It is said that design can function as a "bridge" between artisanal production and contemporary and/or international markets. Do you agree with this statement?



7. Why?

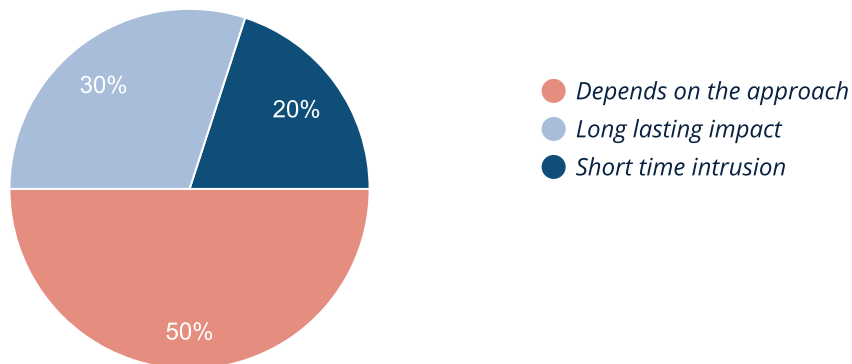
Agree:

- Designers have more contact with contemporary markets (6)
- Product development methodology can be adapted for craft (2)
- Need to move away from foreign & temporary markets (1)

Disagree:

- Designers focus on elite markets (1)
- Aid & rescue discourse (1)
- No respect for autonomy (1)
- Market colonialism (1)

8. Do you consider that interactions with designers are a short-time intrusion into the lives of artisans or do you think that the impact in their work and creative process is long lasting?



9. Why?

Depends on the approach:

- Need for: empathy, true collaboration / cooperation & listening to the needs of the community (4)

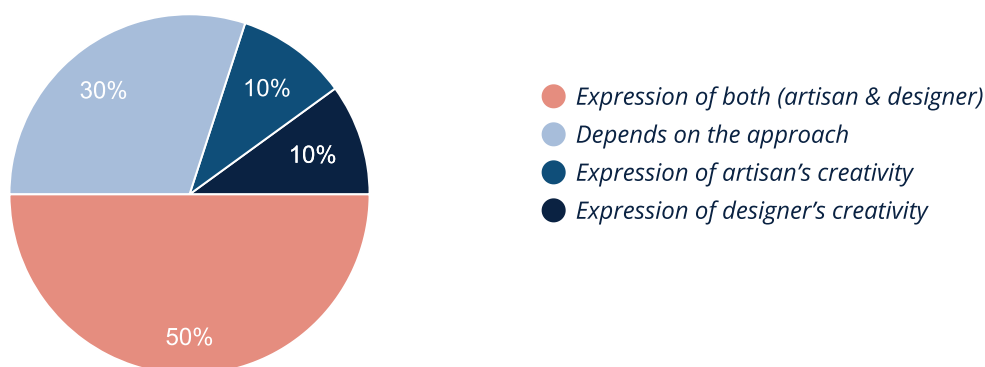
Long lasting impact:

- Design adds value to craft (1)
- Bilateral exchange of knowledge, mutual impact (1)

Short time intrusion:

- Abusive relationship / Colonizing & mercantilistic attitude

10. In your opinion, in collaborations is the final product a result of the expression and creativity of the artisan? the designer? or both?



11. Why?

Expression of both (artisan & designer)

- In general designers' have more exposure/recognition
- Usually the designer's expression is more prevalent
- Bilateral knowledge sharing

Depends on the approach

- It can be co-creation (equal involvement) or collaboration (the designer works on the concept alone)

Expression of artisan's creativity

- Design only adds value through innovation / strategy

Expression of designer's creativity

- Imposition of design vision over traditional knowledge

Appendix 6

Results from sensemaking workshop

Sensemaking workshop

Interactions with craft

Venue: Instituto del Artesano Michoacano [Institute of the Artisan of Michoacán]

Date: 08.03.2019

Duration: 2 hours & 40 minutes

Facilitator: Eduardo Hernández Villalobos

Workshop was arranged with the support of staff at the IAM.

Participants: 10 Professionals currently working at the IAM: 2 department sub-directors, 2 department leads, 2 analysts and 4 administrative & field staff.

Workshop objective:

To discuss how public institutions can improve their support to the craft sector, as well as the role of designers and other stakeholders interacting with artisans in the state of Michoacan.

The workshop focused on ideation for collaboration with artisans to face the current challenges of the sector. Including approaches that go beyond direct intervention in the design of craft objects, and include the surrounding systems, services, and mechanisms of craft research, production, distribution and sales.

With this objective, a group of 10 staff members working inside the institution participated in sensemaking workshop that focused on discussing the different perspectives of artisans, public organizations, the private sector, and other professionals interacting with artisans of Michoacan.

Workshop dynamic:

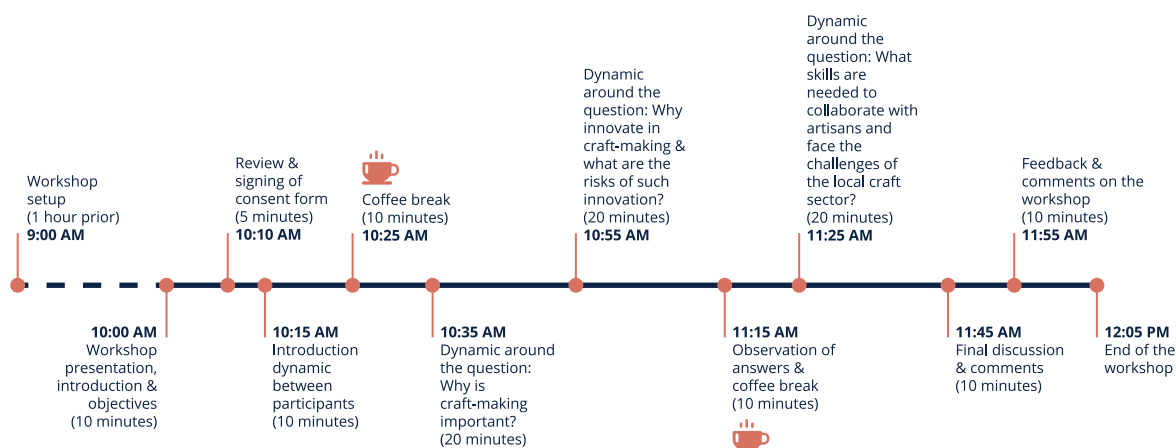
The workshop tasks centred on four main questions:

- Why is craft-making important?
- Why innovate in craft-making? & What are the risks of such innovation?
- What skills are needed to collaborate with artisans and face the challenges of the local craft sector?

Workshop itinerary:

Planned duration: 2 hours & 5 minutes

Actual duration: 2 hours & 40 minutes

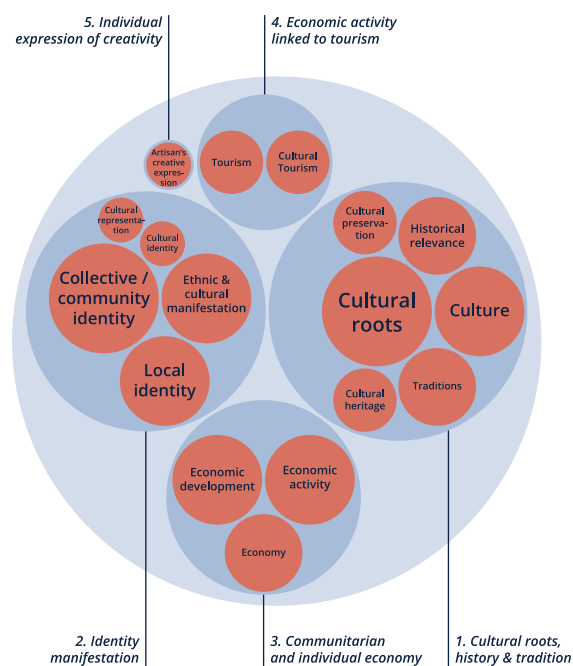


Sensemaking workshop

Interactions with craft

Workshop findings

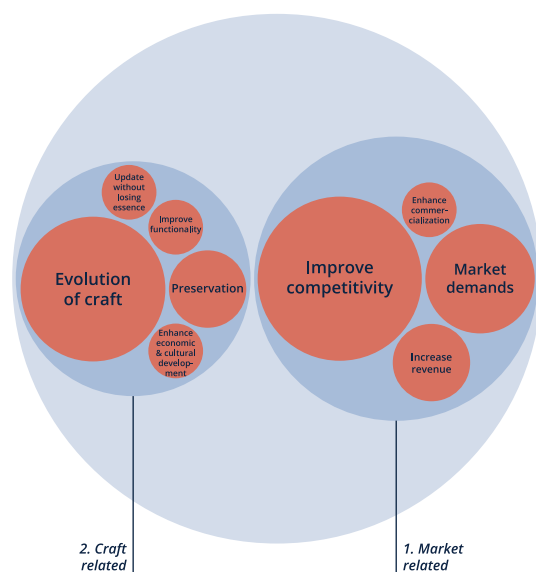
1. Why is craft making important?



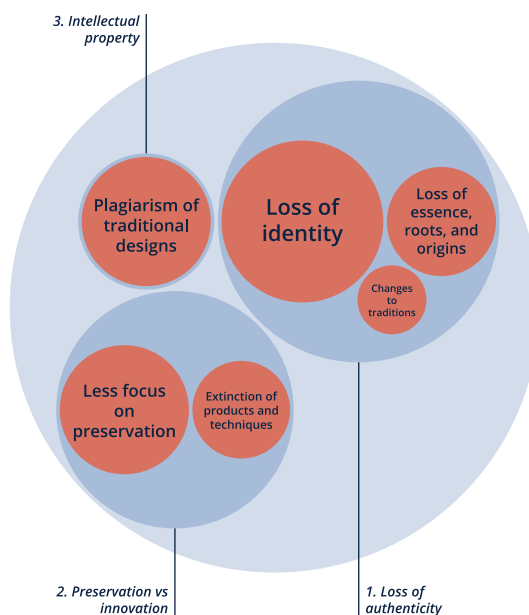
Additional comments that came up during the follow-up discussion:

- Link to cultural events (cultural tourism & others)
- Family activities & family values
- Links to other members of society and different cultures
- Aid for vulnerable sectors of society
- A cultural manifestation of the indigenous sector as an ancestral trade
- A manifestation of indigenous "*cosmovision*" [with reference to Meso-American peoples: a particular way of viewing the world and understanding the universe]

2.1 Why innovate in craft-making?



2.2 What are the risks of such innovation?



Sensemaking workshop

Interactions with craft

Additional comments that came up during the follow-up discussion:

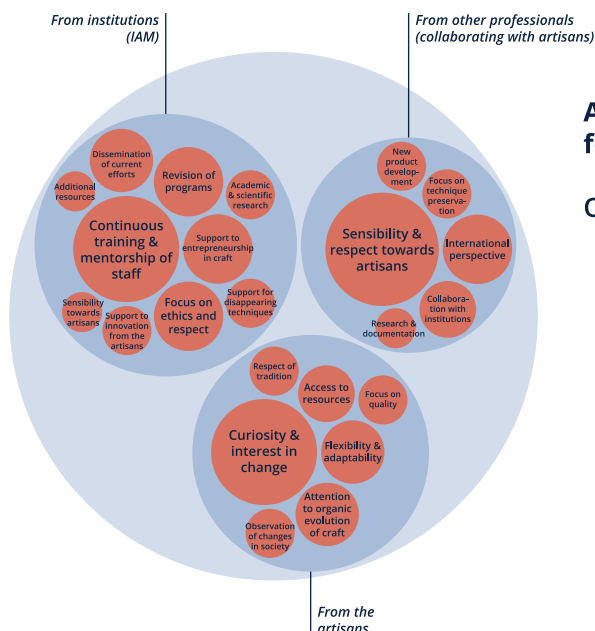
Why innovate?

- Transition to modernity is happening in the craft sector also in an organic way
- Some artisans combine productive activities (e.g. 80% craft and 20% other types of work)
- Environmental issues (e.g. substitutes for raw materials)

What are the risks?

- The older generation of artisans is already of very advanced age
- Intellectual property (should innovation in the craft sector be shared or protected?)
- Non-traditional elements have influence in craft (pop-culture, soccer teams, and other themes appearing in products)

3. What skills are needed to collaborate with artisans and face the challenges of the local craft sector?



Additional comments that came up during the follow-up discussion:

Other concerns related to innovation:

- Innovation can bring undesired loss of identity (most recurring topic)
- Some techniques are linked to religious beliefs, traditional knowledge or other customs that are very sensitive to change
- A part of the cultural identity of a region is completely lost when a technique or product disappears
- The loss in quality as the years pass by is a main concern for the IAM
- New product development and prototyping should be done jointly with artisans and not in isolation by external collaborators
- Knowledge inside the communities can be siloed hindering innovation

About Intellectual property and ownership:

- Use of techniques is considered part of the “cultural heritage” of geographical regions
- However, craft evolves and changes organically and there’s a limit to what institutions can do to avoid interactions across regions
- Intellectual property is important, there’s a concern that other communities copy those who innovate
- Collective brands have had a great impact

Sensemaking workshop

Interactions with craft

Social considerations:

- The decision to innovate should always come from the artisans. Professionals working with artisans should learn from and with them
- Different groups in the sector have different needs (e.g. older people, young artisans, women, children, indigenous communities etc.) and it's necessary to cater to every group
- Much of the craft knowledge is transmitted orally or through practice, hence the importance of documentation
- Traditional objects such as toys are increasingly acquired by collectors or as decoration rather than for use

Innovation in services and systems:

- Innovation in sales/distribution/commercialization can have a considerable impact (technology for sales, packaging, etc.)
- Innovation should also consider the factors surrounding new products (e.g. access to technology, support tools, materials, and processes should be accessible to the entire craft community)

Challenges faced by the IAM:

- Research, documentation and innovation capabilities inside the IAM are limited, a large amount of time is dedicated to administrative and bureaucratic tasks
- Changes in government administrations contribute to lack of continuity in programs and constant change of focus

Additional comments from final discussion

- Internal resources are very limited, that's why **collaboration with external professionals is very important**, participants saw great value in the workshop exercise and appreciated listening to additional perspectives and discussion of these topics, they would like for more approaches like this to take place
- Organizations such as the IAM face a big challenge with changes of government, in other states inside of Mexico similar organizations have recently disappeared or have been substituted with new ones (e.g. Institute of the Artisan of Jalisco)
- Experiences of living in the community have been very helpful in the pasts for design students to understand the needs of the artisans (e.g. project with UAM Azcapotzalco)
- Changes in government also make strategical planning for mid and long term projects very difficult, the main challenges are:
 - Lack of resources (economic and human)
 - Need for outsourcing increases costs (e.g. outsourcing of design tasks)
 - The main focus should be the support to the craft sector, however, bureaucratic & administrative tasks consume most of the time
 - The IAM can function as an axis for collaboration with other professionals, this has been the case in the past, however, changes in government shift priorities
- The institute is facing hard times, current issues include:
 - Lack of appropriate tools, equipment, software, etc.
 - Many services have to be outsourced causing additional expenses
 - In the past, it was possible to make mid-term plans (3 years)
 - It was also common to finish the fiscal year with fewer difficulties

Sensemaking workshop

Interactions with craft

Additional comments by local artisan:

Craft renews constantly, however, this process is so slow that it is barely noticeable over the years. When this change accelerates, we could call it innovation. In the eyes of the public this can be perceived as a rupture and even if it gets accepted by the market, at the interior of the community and institutions it creates an impact that shakes the established criteria.

The workshop focused on ideation for collaboration with artisans to face the current challenges of the sector. Including approaches that go beyond direct intervention in the design of craft objects, and include the surrounding systems, services, and mechanisms of craft research, production, distribution and sales.

Suggestions:

- Institutions can **facilitate** research and activities that tackles issues of production, raw materials, use of new tools, analysis of changes in technical processes, diffusion and commercialisation.
- Competitions: Innovation can be a key aspect to evaluate by the jury, always considering previous work in the traditional communities.
- Overall, the joint work between artisans and industrial designers has resulted in more positive than negative outcomes. The main benefit has been that designers are able to effectively research relevant topics that shorten the path for the artisan, such as: information on new materials, tools, pricing, market studies, fashion and trends.

Appendix 7 Data analysis - Thematic analysis of data collected

Government Officials

Artisans

Designers & Other Collaborators

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The role of design in craft	Perceptions of designers as collaborators	Perceptions of collaboration between artisans	Value of economic development	Value of craft in the community
Design has potential for raising economic value	Designers can be external actors that impose their agenda and then disappear	Struggles to help artisans link to each other	Younger generations of artisans prefer formal education over craft practice	Craft has deep connections to traditional lifestyles
Design has potential for adding value through marketing/strategy	Designers are mostly external actors that want to impose their vision	Organising only between artisans is better than relying in the government	Craft is a tool for keeping away from 'dirty' businesses	Traditional communities can be hermetic and closed to outsiders
Design can help to raise the price of craft	Perceives external collaborators as hostile (lack of recognition, technique knowledge, & community impact)	Knowledge should be shared between different communities	Shift in product typology has helped to bring economic development, jobs & reduce migration	Both designers & artisans are influenced by a globalised reality
Collaborates closely with famous local artist	Doesn't see value in design, since he thinks his customers are looking for traditional objects	Artisan associations allows to organise and ask for support from the government	Younger generations use craft to support their studies as a side activity	Contexts are not fully rural or urban, it depends on each community
Integration of artist into town is important for acceptance by the community	There is a disconnection between craft & design, a barrier and a distance that separates two worlds	Individual artisans struggle to have access to support from the government		Techniques and symbols in craft carry cultural meanings that external collaborators might ignore
Uses artist's recognition and contacts for event promotion	Collaborators in survey: Designers try to impose foreign & decontextualized models	Working with other artisans is difficult bc. of different ideas and inconvenience of leaving family workshop		The act of 'making' has a different meaning and value for artisans than for designers
Exposure to new things is important to discover new paths and new forms to connect	The bridge discourse in design/craft collaborations entails an asymmetrical power structure	Doesn't see a benefit in association, since it implies more costs & hardships than benefits		
In collaborations, it's important to question what are the circumstances, what are the objectives & how to engage	Designers need to fully acknowledge the role of artisans and give due credit	Government backed initiatives tend to favour external collaborators that end up taking leading roles		
Artisans can be designers. There are different types of artisans (and designers)	It's necessary to understand the role of artisans in the community & the politics linked to the practice			
There is affinity in cultural terms & training (between artisans and designers)	Designers need to legitimise their role in the community & make a diagnostic of the situation with them			
Artisans enable & empower designers by allowing them to collaborate and to materialise ideas	Full transparency, inclusion in the process, explicit consent and participation in decision making			
Design can raise (and has done so) the monetary value of craft	Collaborations can be a source for creation of new knowledge through designing & making			
Designers should aim to connect with traditional communities	Craft can play a different role as a communicator of values, different lifestyles, autonomy & even resistance			
Artisans work in a vertical structure while collaboration requires transversality of disciplines and ideas				
The ideal scenario would be to change the aid discourse of craft + design collaboration				
Designers have to approach collaborations from the perspective of apprentices & partners				
Designers & artisans need to collaborate and learn from other disciplines to tackle multifaceted issues				

CRAFT MARKET & TOURISM

Market & links with tourism	Traditional craft & innovation	Pricing, value & taxes
Market is mainly foreigner	Easier continuity for popular art. Utilitarian crafts quickly disappearing	Struggles to communicate & justify amount of time and effort that goes into craft objects
Tourism is the main focus for craft	Need to preserve the 'roots' of craft	Government doesn't pay fair price for artisan's work
Tourism is the main market for craft in the region	Regrets disconnection from indigenous craft knowledge	
Main market is national	Contrary to innovation, tradition values repetition	
Main market is national tourists		
Market is mix of national / international		
Catering to tourists and becoming a 'Pueblo Mágico' is a goal, although it's contentious inside the community		
New products are developed around local festivities & linked to tourism		
Attracting customers to the community is a tool for avoiding intermediaries		
Innovation can be a tool to situate traditional practices in current market & the present context		
The idea of changing design to fit international markets is ethically conflicting		
Modernity imposes external value hierarchies		
Matching modern canons of 'good taste' causes craft to change and loose expression & originality		
International & external markets are unreliable		
Craft becomes unaffordable and exclusive as it caters to international markets that can afford higher prices		
The success of a new craft object can lead to market saturation		
The success of a new product typology can cause additional challenges for the community		

GOVERNMENT & INSTITUTIONS

Downsides of institutional support

- Changes in government affect continuity
- Budget is limited as well as investment in design, documentation & research
- Corruption inside institutions is an issue
- Changes in government affect continuity
- Goals of the government do not necessarily match desires of the community and restrict autonomy
- Distrust of institutions because of corruption and inequality. Will rather not associate with them
- Government doesn't pay fair price for artisan's work
- Changes in government affect continuity
- Goals of the government do not necessarily match desires of the community
- Some communities decide not to rely on external funding because of the cost on loss of autonomy

Positives of institutional support

- Training has been the most successful strategy, but budget is tight
- Sees value in continuous education and training
- Resources and links to other institutions and professionals are more accessible through government
- Despite distrusting institutions sees value in competitions for maintaining craft quality
- Government fulfils a role of linking to academia and to diagnose the craft sector in the macro-level

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SECTOR

Transformations in traditional craft & communities

- Artisans adapt to market demands regardless of design intervention
- It's necessary to diversify range of products so that consumers don't get bored
- Only works with traditional tools & techniques
- Has a lot of interest in learning new techniques & having access to better tools
- Points to inequalities in Capula depending on craft branch (3 variations)
- Innovation implies change and departure from tradition, which disturbs balance in the community
- Craft is in constant change but it's very gradual and hard to notice
- Craft will keep changing regardless of design intervention, due to external factors & need of jobs.

Raw materials & sustainability

- Material sourcing & substitutions are a challenge for the IAM
- Points at material scarcity & friction with transnational mining companies
- Raw materials (clays) are still locally available
- Uses fire kilns and plaster moulds + hand forming techniques
- Substitution of materials and use of appropriate technology are key issues
- Material changes affect technique, work-flow, product design, product typology & cost structure

SALE SPACES & RESELLERS

Access and control of sale spaces

- Sales spaces are managed by government / gov. tolerates informal vendors
- Dispute with indigenous communities that take ownership over sale spaces
- Keeps control over sales spaces by taking care of maintenance of the building
- Self-organised indigenous group took ownership over a building
- Government doesn't invest in occupied space for lack of legal certainty
- Struggles to have access to affordable or free sale spaces
- Government & large institutions have broader commercial reach, distribution channels and access int. markets
- Distribution channels can bring imbalances within the communities

Issues with intermediaries & resellers

- Some resellers pretend to be artisans
- Difficult to distinguish between artisans & resellers
- Main challenge is interaction with intermediaries & price bargaining

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Intellectual property challenges in craft

- Collaboration with design brings some IPR issues to the surface
- Collective brands & craft trademarks are tools for maintaining ownership in the community
- Trademarking of the 3 main techniques in Capula is a tool for claiming ownership and gaining recognition
- Trademarking creates conflicts with other communities that also claim origin / ownership
- Authenticity is relative and mutual influence is unavoidable
- Trademark of intellectual property is at odds with craft practices
- Negative experiences at the international level have pushed the sector towards protectionism
- Inspiration for the Catrina comes from Posada & Diego Rivera
- What we legitimise as cultural heritage had to start somewhere, with some influence. Authenticity is relative
- International IPR experiences have been detrimental for collaborations
- The evolution of the Catrina has lead to a personal expression of community identity

